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COTTAGE READINGS

FROM

BIBLE HISTORY.





COTTAGE READINGS

FROM

BIBLE HISTORY.

INTENDED FOR MOTHERS' MEETINGS
AND COTTAGE HOMES.

BY
M. H.



"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." Prov. xii. 4.

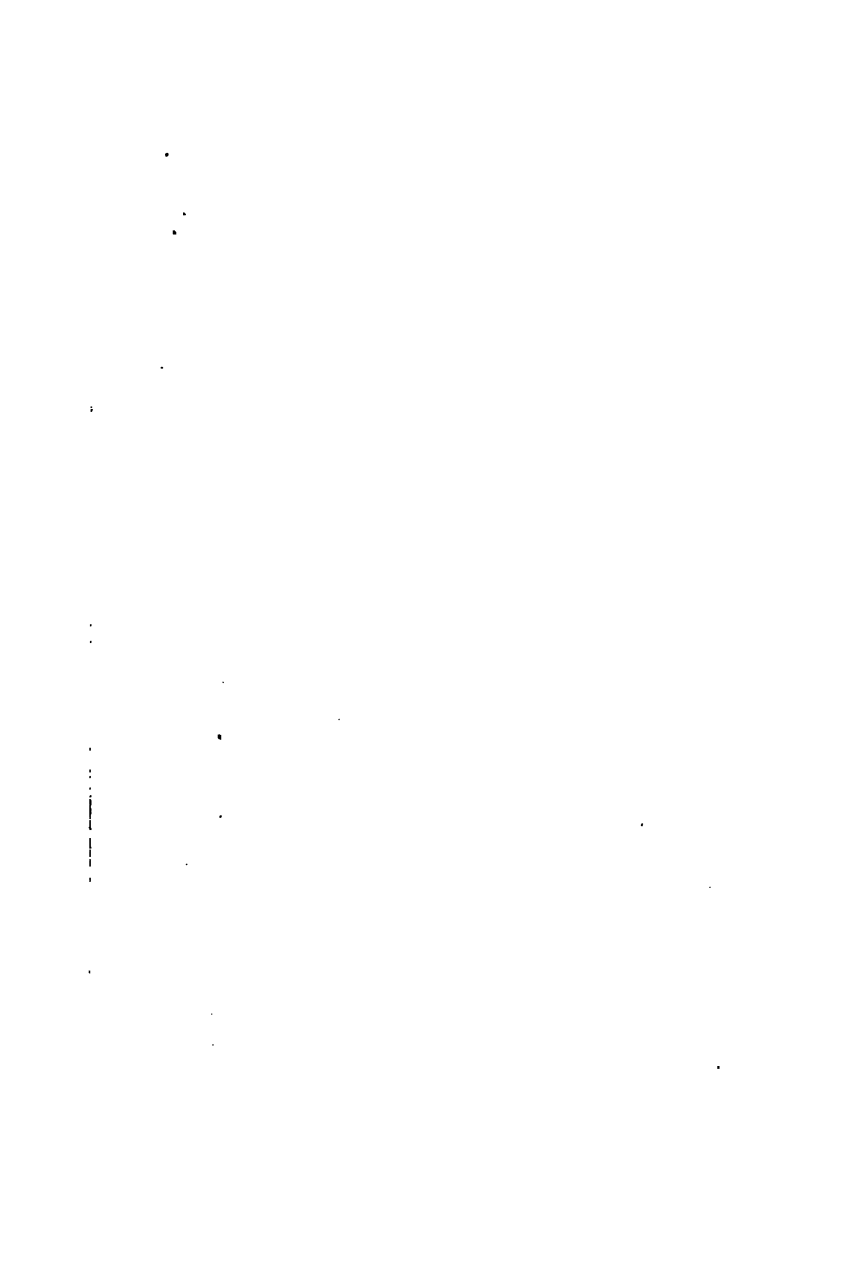
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These short Addresses make no pretension to originality; they were written at the suggestion of a friend to beguile some hours of lonely weakness. Some of them have been read at Mothers' Meetings, and were appreciated by the poor women. It is hoped, that by printing them, they may be made more generally useful amongst our cottage wives and mothers.

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MOTHERS OF THE BIBLE.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

As you, my dear friends, are all or most of you mothers, I think it will interest you to hear about the mothers of olden time, whom we read of in that best of books, the Bible.

I therefore intend, with God's help, to give you a short account of some of them.

Mother! how many loving and happy thoughts spring up in our minds at the name! Where can we find love and tenderness like that of the mother? Look at your own little ones. In every little pain or trouble, do they not look to you for comfort? In every fright or danger, do they not run to you for protection? God, who put such tender love in the heart of the

mother, and such confidence in the heart of the child, often refers to both as an emblem of His own love and tenderness: for example, "as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." (Isaiah lxvi. 13.)

In the book of Deuteronomy we have a beautiful description of the care of the mother eagle. She is described as stirring up the young birds in the nest to excite them to activity, then she spreads her wings, and takes them upon her wings and carries them; thus she protects them and teaches them to fly, just as you, mothers, stretch out your arms to your babes, to tempt them to walk, and are very careful not to let them fall nor be hurt in any way. (See Deuteronomy xxxii. 11.)

In the prophecy of Isaiah we are told, that in the same way the Lord takes care of them that love Him, and put their trust in Him. He says to His people, I have carried, supported, and taken care of you from your birth, just like an infant, and my care of you does not stop there, but "even to grey hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." (Isaiah xlii. 3, 4.)

So you see, my friends, that the care God has for His people is just like the care you give your little ones ; only it far exceeds yours, because God's thoughts are so much higher than your thoughts, and His love so very far exceeds your love. (See Isaiah lv. 8, 9.)

I dare say, it seems impossible for you to believe that God can love you better than you love your children ! It must be so, because we cannot in anything come up to the perfection of God ; and there is one verse in the Bible where God tells us, plainly, that His love is greater than the love of a mother. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (Isaiah xlix. 15.)

Perhaps you have never heard, that in times of very dreadful famine, when no food could be obtained for love or money, mothers have been known to kill and eat their own children. Such a thing happened in the city of Samaria. I will tell you about it.

The king of Syria besieged Samaria, that is, he placed soldiers all round the city walls, so

that nobody could go out of the city, or come in ; this continued for a long time, until all the provisions, which the Israelites had in the city, were consumed, and then there was a great famine.

One day as the king of Israel was passing by the wall, a woman, in great distress, cried to him for help ; the king said to her, “ If the Lord do not help you, how shall I help you ? What ails you ? ” The poor woman then told him her sad story, which was this, that being so much distressed with hunger, she and another woman had agreed to boil and eat their children, that she had given up her child the day before ; but that now, the other woman had hidden her child, and refused to give him up, according to their agreement.

When the king heard this sad story, he rent his clothes to show how sorry he was ; but he could do nothing to help the woman, being himself in as much distress as she was. The next day, the Lord, in a very wonderful way, delivered the city from the Syrians.

Moses prophesied that the same thing would happen at the siege of Jerusalem. He says,

“The eye of the tender and delicate woman shall be evil toward her children which she shall bear, for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates.” (Deut. xxviii. 56, 57.) This prophecy, as we find from history, was literally fulfilled.

A Jewish lady, named Mary, who had been deprived of all that she possessed, and robbed of all the food she could get, was reduced to such a state of distress and madness, that she seized her own child, an infant at the breast, killed it with her own hand, and then roasted and ate it. These are sad pictures, my friends, and we may be quite sure that the mothers must have been terribly distressed, and mad with hunger, or they never could have done so. But I have not done yet : in India, and other heathen countries where the people worship idols, hundreds of little children have been sacrificed to their cruel gods.

I am thankful to tell you, that our good English Government made a law in India, some years ago, to prevent the murder of infants, so that now it is stopped ; but before that law was

made, you might have seen on some great idol feast-day, children thrown, by their own mothers, under the wheels of the great car on which the idol rode in state, and there crushed to death, in order to please the cruel heathen god, as the poor ignorant mothers thought.

Even in our own happy England many poor babes, the offspring of lust, are yearly destroyed by their wicked mothers ! Of course, when such cases are known, the women are punished according to the law ; but alas ! too many escape detection. God, however, sets His mark upon them, as He did upon unhappy Cain. They will not escape in the day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known. They shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. (See Rev. xxi. 8 ; xxii. 15.)

Let us now reverse the picture, for we know of many beautiful instances of mothers willing to give their lives to save their children from suffering and death, as you my friends would, I dare say, be ready to do.

A woman, with her infant in her arms, was late one day passing over a wide common ; she

was far from her home, or from any place of shelter, when she was overtaken by a terrible snow storm, for it was in the depth of winter. She hastened on, as fast as the driving wind and storm would permit, but at length she was so overcome with fatigue, that she could go no further, and was obliged to sit down in the drifting snow. To protect her child, which she loved more than her own life, she unfastened her dress, and laid the infant next to her bare bosom, and then tied the clothes over it, as well as she could. Her limbs were so benumbed with cold that she could not move, but was obliged to remain in the snow-drift, where, next morning, she was found quite stiff and dead. The dear little babe, however, protected by its mother's clothes, and warm at her heart, lay sleeping in her bosom, unhurt by the storm and bitter frost of that inclement night.

It is sad, but pleasant, to dwell on such a tale of love as this, to which, if memory did but serve me, I might add many more.

What fatigue, what days and nights of anxious watching and care do mothers go through with their children, in their infancy, and when they

are sick ! What sorrow when they wander from the right path ! How many of those poor wretched daughters of sin, in this and other large towns, have their sorrowing mothers in the country, longing to bring them back again to the paths of virtue and happiness ! I remember hearing of one loving, faithful, but sorrowing Christian mother, who never fastened the door of her cottage by night or day, because she expected her undutiful, wandering child to return in answer to her prayers, and she would not have her come, and find the door closed against her.

How many a widowed mother's heart is wrung by the unkindness of sons, of whom, perhaps in their childhood, she felt too proud. She looks to them now for that support she has a right to claim from them ; but alas ! they are spending their earnings in idleness and drink, or they have gone away beyond the sea, leaving her to labour hard in her old age, or to live on the small pittance allowed her by the parish. If any of you, my friends, have disobedient children, I would advise you to look well into the cause, and see if there is not something in your

own conduct, or in your management of your children, which has caused them to despise your authority. Perhaps you did not punish them when they were rebellious. Perhaps, when they cried for something you knew they would be best without, you gave it to them, rather than deny yourself by refusing it. So now that they are older, you have no power to restrain them, and you have to mourn over *their* misconduct, and *your own* folly!

Thus we see, dear friends, that although God has, in infinite mercy, planted love to each other in the hearts of both mothers and their children, so as to make them naturally a protection and comfort to one another; yet, through the wickedness of their hearts, both fail in their duty.

Wherever God's plan of love and mercy is followed out in families, by both parents and children, how blessed, and how happy these families are! How much happiness they enjoy in each other's affection! how much confidence they have in each other's love!

But now let us dwell for a short time on that love which never changes; which, as I said

before, far exceeds the mother's love—that love which is infinite and unchangeable! The love of God, in Jesus Christ, to us sinners!

“God is love.” How is this love made known to us? By the death of Christ.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John iii. 16.)

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John iv. 9, 10.)

You will observe, that it was God's love to sinners, not the sinner's love to God, which brought the Son of God from heaven, to live on earth, and to die a cruel death for our redemption. There is no love to God in our hearts, *naturally*; “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom. viii. 7, 8.) How is it then, you will ask, that

anybody loves God? "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John iv. 19.)

If any of you feel any desire in your heart to love God, it is because His love to you has given you that desire. It is God alone who can teach you to love Him.

Will you not then go to God, in the name of Jesus, and ask Him to put His love into your heart? You have many trials, many things to vex you every day you live. You often sin. Some of you fall into passions, are impatient with your husbands and children. You want to do better, because these things make you unhappy.

Come to Jesus, that loving Saviour, whose door of mercy is never shut.

Come, and tell Jesus of all your sins, all your sorrows ; all your trials and vexations.

He will pardon ALL your sins ; He will heal your sorrows ; He will comfort you, in all your trials, and He will enable you to bear all your vexations with patience.

Listen to the words of our gracious God and Saviour. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as

scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah i. 18.)

"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. xi. 28.)

"Blessed be God, even the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulations." (2 Cor. i. 3, 4.)

"Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." (1 Peter v. 7.)

Yes, dear friends and mothers, tell Jesus everything. You have no idea what a blessed effect this would have upon your minds and hearts. It does you a great deal of good, sometimes, to talk over your troubles with a neighbour; their sympathy is soothing to your spirit: but then they cannot really help you, they cannot take the burden off your heart; but Jesus can, and He says to you, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." (Psalm lv. 22.)

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." (Phil. iv. 6, 7.)

HARK ! my soul, it is the Lord ;
'Tis thy Saviour ; hear His word ;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee :
" Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me ?

I deliver'd thee when bound,
And when wounded, heal'd thy wound ;
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,
Turn'd thy darkness into light.

Can a woman's tender care
Cease towards the child she bare ?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee.

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

Thou shalt see My glory soon,
When the work of grace is done ;
Partner of My throne shall be ;
Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me ?

Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is cold and faint :
Yet I love Thee, and adore ;
Oh for grace to love Thee more !

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST MOTHER.

Genesis ii. 21—25; iii. iv. 1—16, 25, 26.

I PROMISED, dear friends, to give you a history of some of the mothers mentioned in the Bible. I think I had therefore better begin with the first mother that ever lived on this earth. You will all remember that she was called Eve, which name was given to her by Adam, her husband, because she was the mother of all living. Eve signifies living. (Gen. iii. 20.)

There are some things in which Eve was remarkable, and in which she was different to all the women that have ever lived.

The first of these is, that she was not born into the world an infant, as we all were. Eve was *created*. We have the history of her formation given us in the second chapter of Génesis.

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

This is the way, my friends, in which Eve was made or rather created. It is so wonderful, that if we had not been told it by God Himself, in His most holy Word, we could never have thought of it. Eve, being thus one flesh with Adam, became his wife, for “Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.”

Here we have revealed to us the very close union there is between the woman and her husband. And this close union was not confined to Adam and Eve, but it exists now between husbands and wives, as strongly as it did then, between this first husband and wife, for mark what follows in the next verse, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

I am afraid that husbands and wives forget this, when they are unkind to each other. When the husband is hard upon the poor wife, neglects her, and spends upon himself that money which the wife ought to have for the supply of her necessities. And the wife too forgets this, when she is disobliging to her husband, and neglectful of his comforts!

Listen to what St. Paul says on this subject: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife. . . . Husbands love your wives. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself . . . and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (Eph. v. 22—33.

The next thing remarkable about Eve, and in which she was different to all other women, is, that she was originally without sin, for in the first chapter of Genesis, we are told, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Yes; "God made man upright."

Eve, then, knew what it was to be perfectly and truly innocent; a happiness which no other woman has ever known. She was, like her husband, made in the moral image of God, free from sin's defilement.

But, alas, for Eve! she did not continue in this blessed, holy state. She fell! Yes; Eve was remarkable and alone in this too; that she was the first woman that sinned. We must now consider for a few minutes her unhappy fall and its consequences. When God had made Adam and Eve, He put them into a pleasant garden called Eden. In this garden, "the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." When God put them into this garden, He gave them a command, which they, as the creatures of God, were bound to obey. Observe well, my friends, the command of God. "And the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for

in the day that thou eatest thereof *thou shalt surely die.*"

This command is plain and simple, and it is given to the woman as well as to the man, although the text does not speak of the woman by name.

For suppose the owner of the room or cottage in which any of you are living, were to say to any one of your husbands, "I give you notice to quit this dwelling this day week." Would you not understand that you were to leave the room or cottage as well as your husband? Of course you would, although not one word might have been said to you individually about it. If your husband left, you must leave too, because you and your husband are one.

Just so, in this command of God, Eve was as much bound to obey as her husband, and she knew this, as we shall find. But to go on with our story of the fall.

There was an enemy in the garden; an enemy bent on man's ruin! Alas! my friends, we all have a deadly enemy; one who is continually leading us into sin. This enemy, as you know, is the devil, called in this history

of Eve the serpent, because he took the form of a serpent, the better to deceive her; he is called elsewhere, "that old serpent, which is the devil." St. Paul says, "the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty."

Well, this cruel enemy finds Eve alone in some part of the garden, and he tempts her to think hard thoughts of God; he tries to make her discontented with the provision God has made for her. "And he said unto the woman, yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Eve answered, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

Do you not see here how the devil had already put some of his poison into Eve's heart? for she did not say the whole truth when she said *lest* ye die, because God had said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt *surely* die." Thus, by degrees, she was prepared to believe the lie which the devil was now going to tell her: "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die;" and then he went on to persuade

her that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food, and that she would be the wiser and better for eating of it. The end was that Eve took some of the fruit, and gave some to Adam, and they both ate of it; and thus they disobeyed the command of God, and fell from that state of innocence in which they were created, and they became sinners.

What a sad change had now come upon this once happy couple! Now they dared not meet the eye of that holy God who had made them. They were afraid. Sin made them afraid; and so they tried to hide themselves amongst the trees of the garden. But when did any sinner ever escape the all-seeing eye of God? Never! for "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov. xv. 3.)

The Lord God, in mercy, came and spoke to Adam, and said to him, "Where art thou?" Then follows the sentence passed upon the unhappy pair, with the curse pronounced upon the serpent which had deceived them. The man is condemned to labour, to earn his bread by the sweat of his face; the woman is to suffer pain and trouble in childbirth, and to be in subjection

to her husband. The sentence of death is passed upon them both : " Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This is the death of the body. They had already experienced a spiritual death, that came upon them as soon as ever they had sinned, as St. Paul tells us, " By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." (Rom. v. 12.) Yet in the midst of judgment the Lord remembered mercy, and gave them the promise of a Saviour, in these remarkable words to the serpent : " I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This promise was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, was born of the Virgin Mary. " When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. iv. 4, 5.)

But to return to Adam and Eve, they were now turned out of the garden, God having first given to them the skins of some animals for a covering. As sinners they could no longer

dwell in that beautiful place, nor come forth *naked* to the world.

“Why should our garments made to hide
Our parents’ sin, provoke our pride ;
The art of dress did ne’er begin
Till Eve, our mother, learnt to sin.”

The next thing we read about Eve is that she becomes a mother. Her first-born son she calls Cain, which signifies *gotten*, or *acquired*. It would appear from this that Eve fancied she had already got the promised seed ; and she received him with such joy and thought so much of him, that when his brother was born she set little store by him and called him Abel, or *vanity*.

As the boys grew up they were employed, as many boys are now : Cain, in cultivating the ground, and Abel, in taking care of some sheep. Their parents, no doubt, taught them to worship God. They told them about the promised Saviour, and of the sacrifices which God required them to offer up from time to time as an evidence of their faith in that promise. The sacrifice which God required, as a type of the Saviour, was a lamb which was to be killed and burnt upon an altar.

Cain, who it appears chose to have his own way, "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord;" whilst Abel, in obedience to the Divine command, and with faith in the promised sacrifice for sin, "brought of the firstling of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous." (Heb. xi. 4.)

Cain, we are told, "was very wrath, and his countenance fell." From this time he hated his brother, and one day "when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

Yes, dear friends, this son, so much loved and so much thought of by his mother, became a murderer—the first murderer! Oh! what sorrow must now fill the heart of poor Eve, when she looks upon her murdered child, when she thinks that this fearful crime was committed by that son whom she had, from his birth, so loved and cherished. Here she saw the bitter

fruit of her own sin ; she saw, too, for the first time, death, "the wages of sin." How little did she think, when taking the fruit from the tree, it would ever come to this !

It is often thus, dear friends, that we do not experience the bitterest fruit of our sin until long after the sin has been committed. What terrible separation from her children must Eve have now, for not only is Abel dead, and must be buried out of her sight, but Cain, her much loved Cain, must depart from the home of his parents, must become from this time a wanderer upon the earth, for so the Lord decreed he should be punished, for He said unto him, "Now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand ; when thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength ; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

Cain, we are told, "went out from the presence of the Lord." Miserable, unhappy Cain ! Is it not to be feared that thy mother, who thought so much of thee, her first-born son, neglected to check the first beginnings of sin in

thy young life? neglected to punish thee in thine infancy and childhood? Now, how hast thou wrung with sorrow that mother's heart, deprived, as she is, of two sons in one day! For her dear murdered Abel, she has hope that he is gone to happiness; but of thee, placed as thou art under the awful curse of a sin-avenging God, she can have no hope, nothing but a certain, fearful looking for of judgment!

Oh, my friends, you who have sons seek for grace to train them up in the right way; pray for them, that in their early years the evil passions of their hearts may be subdued by the grace of God. Pray that the fear of God may find place in their hearts, and that they may be kept from evil—from the evil one. If you pray earnestly for them, then I am sure you will strive to set them a good example in your own life and conduct. You will not let them see you give way to evil tempers and passions; you will not let them hear you use bad words. Be yourselves reconciled to God, through faith in the Lord Jesus, that same Saviour in whom the righteous Abel believed, and then you, like

him, shall have your person and works accepted of God ; for “if thou doest well, shall thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” Yes ; unpardoned sin lieth at the door, if thou accept not that Saviour, so freely offered to the lost ! You will be glad to know, that in the midst of her sorrow poor Eve was not forgotten by her God. Another son was given to her, and she “called his name Seth ; for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” She had not forgotten her good son Abel ; her heart clings to him ; but she accepts Seth as given to her in his place, and in her heart she thanks her God for this His precious gift ! It is from Seth that we are all descended, for the descendants of the wicked Cain were all destroyed in the flood. Noah and his family, who alone were saved, being of the family of Seth.

So you see, my friends, the curse rested not only on Cain, but on all those descended from him, for there was not one amongst them, as far as we know, who did the will of God. Hear what a dreadful picture we have given us by God Himself, of the state of the world just

before that awful flood of waters was sent. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." (Gen. vi. 5, 11, 12)

This is a terrible description of wickedness and sin, is it not? And yet the Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the gospel that "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." (Luke xvii. 26, 27, 30.)

These people were going on in their sins, they repented not of their deeds, they all perished in the flood. So, dear friends, shall it be now: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The day of the Lord's judgment is at hand. Soon! we cannot tell how soon, "The Lord

Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ; in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.) As none escaped the flood but those who were found in the ark, so none shall in that day escape, but those who are found in Christ.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

"SHew pity, Lord ; O Lord forgive ;
Let a repenting rebel live !
Are not thy mercies large and free ?
May not a sinner trust in thee ?

" My crimes though great, do not surpass
The power and glory of thy grace ;
Great God, thy nature hath no bound !
So let thy pardoning love be found.

" Oh, wash my soul from every sin,
And make my guilty conscience clean ;
Here, on my heart, the burden lies,
And past offences round me rise.

" My lips with shame my sins confess,
Against thy law, against thy grace ;
Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
I am condemned, but thou art clear !

"Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death ;
And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well.

"Yet save a trembling sinner, Lord ;
Whose hope, still hov'ring round thy word,
Would light on some sweet promise there,
Some sure support against despair."

CHAPTER III.

THE AGED MOTHER.

Genesis xii., xvi. 1—3; xvii. 1—21; xviii. 1—15; xx., xxi.
1—8; xxii., xxiii.

THE next mother whose name is given us in the Bible is Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Her original name was Sarai, afterwards changed, by God's command, to Sarah, which means Princess, a grand name, and given to her with this promise to Abraham, "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." As we trace the history of Sarah, we must keep this promise in mind.

The first thing we are told of Sarah, after her marriage, is that she "was barren; she had no child." Abraham was at this time living in

a place called Ur of the Chaldees. When he was about seventy years old God said unto him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." In obedience to this command, Abraham, accompanied by his wife, his father Terah, and his nephew Lot, left Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran and dwelt there until the death of Terah. After this Abraham, Sarah, and Lot went on into the land of Canaan. When God called Abraham to go into this land, He gave him a remarkable promise, which Abraham believed, although as yet he had no child. This is the promise of God to Abraham: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

On Abraham's arrival in the land of Canaan, another promise is given to him about that land: "And the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land."

These promises must have raised Sarah's expectations and greatly increased her desire for children ; and what a great trial of her faith and patience must the long waiting time have been ! It is easy to believe a promise when it is first given, but when we are kept waiting, year after year, for the fulfilment of it, our patience is sorely tried and our faith apt to fail. But, dear friends, it should not be so, because "He is faithful that promised," and what He has promised He is "able also to perform." (Heb. x. 23 ; Rom. iv. 21.)

In consequence of a famine in the land of Canaan, Abraham took his wife down into Egypt, and there her beauty seems to have been a great snare, for Abraham, forgetting for the time to trust in his God, told Sarah to say that she was his sister, lest the Egyptians should kill him in order to get possession of his wife. Sarah did as her husband told her, and she was taken into the king's house, and was thus placed in great temptation ; but the Lord watched over her and delivered her, so that no evil happened unto her.

When the king of Egypt found out that he

had been deceived, he was displeased with Abraham, and "sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had."

In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis we find that, in condescension to the weakness of Abraham's faith, God renews His promises to him, and tells him, not only that he shall have a son to be his heir, but that his seed shall be as the stars in the sky for multitude. Some time after this poor Sarah, finding that she had no children, advised Abraham to take Hagar, her maid, to be his wife. I suppose she thought that by this means the promises of God could be fulfilled; but she brought upon herself and others much sorrow. And so we shall always find it, dear friends, when we, at any time, take the ordering of events into our own hands. Let us always seek for patience to wait the Lord's time, for the fulfilment of even the lawful desires of our hearts. Sarah was quite right in desiring to have a son, because, unless she had one, how could the word of God be true, but it was not for her to bring it about in her own way. Abraham took Sarah's advice, he made Hagar his wife and she had a son, who was named Ishmael.

In eastern countries, and in the time of Abraham, men were permitted to have more than one wife; but I do not think that the custom was ever agreeable to the mind of God, for He created man, at the first, "Male and female," as we are told in the fifth chapter of Genesis, "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them." And the custom is proved, by experience, to have been a bad one, because it was the source of so much unhappiness, jealousy, and sin, in the families we read of in the Bible

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to him again, and as if to leave no doubt on Abraham's mind of His power to fulfil the promises before made to him, although he and Sarah were both so old, He reveals Himself as the Almighty God, "And said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. . . . As

for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. . . . And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." And the Lord now actually fixes the time when this son shall be given to them, for He says, "But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year."

In the next chapter we have an interesting account of the visit of three angels to Abraham's tent, and his hospitable reception of them. Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent in the heat of the day: "And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I

pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that, ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant, and they said, so do, as thou hast said."

Now observe the directions given by Abraham to Sarah: "And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth." Then Abraham himself ran and fetched a calf, and gave it to a young man, who hastened to dress it; when all was ready, then they set before the guests the calf, with butter and milk, and they ate of it, whilst Abraham stood by under the tree. It may interest you to know that the same kind of hospitality is shown to strangers at the present time, in the same place, as you will see from the following account* given by a traveller who was there not long ago:

"Our little cavalcade was seen approaching, and ere we reached the brow of the hill, the

* "Bashan and its Giant Cities." Page 87. Professor Porter.

whole population had come out to meet and welcome us. The Sheikh, a noble looking young Druse, had already sent a man to bring a kid from the nearest flock, to make a feast for us, and we saw him bounding away through an opening in the forest. He returned in half an hour with the kid on his shoulder.

"We assured the hospitable Sheikh that it was impossible for us to remain. Our servants were already far away over the plain, and we had a long journey before us.

"He would listen to no excuse. The feast must be prepared.

"My lord could not pass by his servant's house without honoring him by eating a morsel of bread, and partaking of the kid which is being made ready. The sun is high; the day is long; rest for a time under my roof; eat and drink, and then pass on in peace.

"There was so much of the true spirit of patriarchal hospitality here, so much that recalled to mind scenes in the life of Abraham (Gen. xviii, 1—8), Manoah (Judges xiii, 15), and other scripture celebrities, that we found it hard to refuse. Time pressed, however, and we were

reluctantly compelled to leave before the kid was served."

St. Paul evidently refers to this custom when he says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews xiii, 2.)

These three men, entertained by Abraham and Sarah, were angels; one of them appears to have been more than an angel, being the Lord Jesus Himself, the Angel of the Covenant. And now the promise that in a short time "Sarah shall have a son," is again repeated in Sarah's hearing. So surprising did it seem to her, that at her advanced age she should bear a son, that, we are told, she laughed. "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?"

Sarah was reproved for this, and mark the answer given to reprove her unbelief: "And the Lord said unto Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and

Sarah shall have a son." Poor Sarah, ashamed and afraid to have her secret thoughts thus made known, said "I laughed not." But the Lord said to her, "Nay, but thou didst laugh."

We learn here two things: first, that the very secret thoughts of our hearts are known to God. Sarah had only laughed *within* herself. She had not spoken a word loud enough for any one to hear; yet all was known to the Lord, as David says in the 139th psalm, "Thou understandest my thought afar off." Again we learn that all things are possible with God; for see the question put by the Lord to Abraham for the strengthening of Sarah's faith: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" In times of trouble and distress think of this, dear friends, and though all seems dark, and there is none to help you, cry unto the Lord, believing that nothing is too hard for Him to do, in answer to the faithful prayer of those who trust in Him. As for Sarah, her faith appears to have been greatly strengthened at this time, for we find it said of her in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of

a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." (Heb. vi. 11.)

The next thing recorded in the life of Sarah, is that she accompanied her husband to Gerar; and there, strange to say, Abraham fell into the same error as he had done at a much earlier period of his life, on his visit to Egypt; he said of Sarah, "She is my sister." So that Sarah was taken by Abimelech, the king, with the intention of making her his wife; but the Lord interposed on her behalf, for He appeared to the king in a vision, by night, and told him that Sarah was a married woman. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and after rather severely reproving both Abraham and his wife, sent them away, with a present. Soon after this visit to Gerar, Sarah's promised son is born, and Abraham called him Isaac, which means laughter. This name God had commanded him to give the child in remembrance of Abraham and Sarah having laughed within themselves when the promise was made to them (Gen. xvii. 17; xviii. 12); the one it would seem from joy and delight, the

other in unbelief, as though it were too good to be true.

Although we have no further account of the infancy and boyhood of Isaac, we may be sure that he grew up the comfort and delight of his aged parents. When he was nearly thirty years old a very remarkable and trying command is given to Abraham, and it appears from the narrative given us in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, that Sarah was not made acquainted with it.

“And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt (that is *try*) Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham, and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Here was a hard thing to do, but at the command of God Abraham was ready to obey; his faith had often been sorely tried, and sometimes it had failed, but now Abraham was strong in faith, and he remembered the promise: “In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Accounting that God was able

to raise him up, even from the dead." (Heb. xi. 19.) So without saying a word to Sarah he rose up early in the morning to go to the place as God had commanded, taking Isaac with him, and all things necessary for the sacrifice.

On the third day they arrived at the place, Abraham and his son went up the mountain together, and there Abraham made all things ready for the sacrifice, and bound Isaac upon the altar; but just as he raised the knife to slay his son, the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

With what humble joy and thanksgiving did Abraham now unbind his son, and offer in his stead a ram, which he saw behind him, caught by its horns in a thicket! "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh, that is, The Lord will see or provide."

How happy must Abraham and Isaac have felt as they returned home to tell Sarah all that had happened, and then we may be sure they

all gave thanks to God! About twelve years after this, Sarah died at the great age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, and Abraham mourned and wept for her, and buried her in the cave of Machpelah, which he bought with the field where it was situated, for a burial place. And now having come to the end of Sarah's life, let us gather up a few lessons that may be useful to us.

As we noted some things remarkable about Eve, so we must say that there are things in Sarah's life which are remarkable. It is extraordinary the way in which the Lord saw fit to deal with her, in the gift of her son Isaac. I say *gift*, dear friends, because you must know that children are gifts from God, as we are told in the 127th psalm,* "Lo, children and the fruit of the womb: are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord." We cannot tell why Sarah had so long to wait for her *one* gift; except that we know, one reason must have been, the trial and strengthening of her faith. In our unbelief and impatience, we say, Why did not God fulfil His promise at once? He could have done so, and according to nature it would

*Prayer book version.

appear to have been more easy ; but we must ever remember that God can as easily work contrary to nature as He can work according to nature. He who had power to create man at the first out of the dust of the ground, could give Sarah a child when she was past age. Though, during the years of waiting, Sarah's faith and patience often failed, yet at length, by God's grace, they triumphed, and Sarah had her reward.

Let us learn, from her example, to be patient under the various trials we may have in passing through life. Trials of poverty, trials of hard labour, trials with your husbands, and trials with your children. Carry all these burdens to the foot of the Saviour's cross. Instead of getting impatient and angry, tell Jesus all your difficulties, and ask Him to take your burdens. Tell Him that you can do nothing of yourself, but that you know He can and will help you.

Then again Sarah is a remarkable and bright example of obedience and reverence as a wife. St. Peter notices this in his epistle, and holds her up as a pattern wife. Speaking of the duties of wives, he says, " Likewise, ye wives,

be in subjection to your own husbands . . . Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." (1 Peter iii. 1, 6.) We may remark also, that although Isaac was their only son, and the son of their old age, and greatly beloved by them, yet Abraham and Sarah did not spoil him by over-indulgence; but they brought him up in the fear of God, and in obedience to themselves, his parents. We see this in Isaac's conduct in that wonderful transaction, when Abraham was commanded to offer him up as a sacrifice, for there was no rebellion, but entire submission to the will of God, as made known to his father.

We have also the testimony of God's own Word with regard to Abraham; for the Lord said, (Gen. xviii. 19) "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Oh, that such a testimony could be given of fathers and mothers now-a-days! Oh, that men of all ranks did command their children to keep the fear of the Lord, and that wives and mothers

were, like Sarah, helpmeets in this respect ; then what happy families we should have. How much less of sin, poverty, and misery would there be in the world !

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom : a good understanding have all they that do His commandments : his praise endureth for ever.” (Psalm cxi. 10.)

“ Oh ! for a faith that will not shrink,
Though press'd by many a foe ;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe ;—

“ That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chastening rod ;
But, in the hour of grief or pain,
Can lean upon its God ;—

“ A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without ;
That when in danger knows no fear,
In darkness feels no doubt ;—

“ A faith that keeps the narrow way
Till life's last spark is fled,
And with a pure and heavenly ray
Lights up a dying bed.

“ Lord give me such a faith as this,
And then, whate'er may come,
I'll taste e'en here the hallow'd bliss
Of an eternal home.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOND MOTHER.

Genesis xvi., xxi. 9—21.

You will remember, dear friends, those of you who were present at our last meeting, that I told you when Sarah, after waiting ten years, found that she had no son, she advised Abraham to make Hagar, her bondmaid, his wife. Now it is this Hagar that I want to tell you about to-day, for there are some very interesting and instructive things recorded of her in the Bible narrative which may be useful to us.

Hagar lived as a servant or slave in the family of Abraham; she was by birth an Egyptian. Whether she was born of Egyptian parents in Abraham's household, or whether he purchased her in Egypt when he went down there in that time of famine, I told you of, we cannot tell, for no account is given us in God's Word, and we

know nothing of Hagar but what is written there.

Hagar is first mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Genesis. There we are told Sarah "had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar." I should think that Hagar had been several years in Sarah's service, and that, up to this period, she had been faithful and respectful in her conduct towards her mistress; if she had not, it is not likely that Sarah would have wished her husband to take her to be his wife; but as soon as Hagar was thus, as she thought, exalted, and she found that she was likely to have a child, her feelings towards her mistress were changed, and with this change of feeling came a change in her conduct, "her mistress was despised in her eye. Sarah, of course, very soon saw and felt the change in Hagar, and she spoke to Abraham about it with much warmth, and he said to her, "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; (that means in thy power) do to her as it pleaseth thee."

Sarah, influenced probably by feelings of anger, and perhaps jealousy, "dealt hardly with her," and when she afflicted or punished Hagar,

“she fled from her face.” How foolish was Hagar’s conduct, and yet how common! So long as she was kept in the place assigned her by God, she appears to have done right and was happy; but as soon as she was taken, as she thought, out of that position, all goes wrong. Pride rises in her heart; she despises her mistress, and no longer submits to her control. Let us learn to be content with the lot Providence has appointed for us, because we may be quite sure, that if we are not happy in doing our duty in that state of life in which we were born, we should not be happy in any condition. It was a pity that Sarah had placed her maid in such temptation; and it was sad for Hagar that she had not wisdom and grace to resist the evil, and to remember what she owed to her mistress. Now let us see what happened to poor Hagar after she fled from Sarah.

The Bible narrative tells us, “And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.” She had evidently fled away towards her own country, Egypt, for Shur appears to

have been not very far from the Red Sea. And the angel said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? And whither wilt thou go?" I cannot help remarking here, that the Lord (for this angel was the Lord Jesus, the Angel of the Covenant) puts Hagar at once into her right place, when He said "Hagar, Sarai's *maid*," thus reminding her of her duty to Sarah; and reproving her pride and rebellion. The question, too, would lead her to think of the home she had left, and of the danger to which she was exposing herself. Hagar, in her reply, takes her right place, for she said, "I flee from the face of *my mistress* Sarai."

Let us now, dear friends, read and observe the directions and promises made to Hagar. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress and submit thyself under her hands. . . . I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. Behold thou art with child, and shall bear a son; and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against

him ; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

First, you see Hagar is commanded to return to her mistress, and to her duty of submission as a servant. Hagar's place and duty were in no wise altered in God's judgment. She was still a servant and a bondmaid to Sarah ; and it was only in the fulfilment of her duty in that state of life that she could be happy or expect God's blessing. What a blow was this command to Hagar's pride—to return—to submit. How it reminds us of the instructions given to servants in St. Peter's Epistle ; he says : " Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently ? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (1 Peter ii. 18—20.) Yes, my friends, here was a hard lesson for Hagar to learn ! It was a lesson that few of us try to learn ! We do wrong, we complain of the consequences, we lay the fault

upon others, or upon circumstances ; but we do not come down and acknowledge our own fault, and submit. It is pride which hinders, which makes it so hard.

You and your husband have a misunderstanding about something, perhaps a very trifling thing ; you say hasty, grievous words to each other, words which stir up anger, words that you did not mean to say, and that afterwards you wish you had not said. When the angry feelings have passed from your heart, you would give anything not to have said what you did ; you feel so sorry. But why don't you tell each other that you are sorry ? Oh ! it is pride that keeps you from doing that ; neither of you likes to be the first to try to make it up, and so you go on day after day, feeling very cross with each other, and very miserable ! What sad results have followed a first quarrel between man and wife ! The wife has become careless and indifferent to the comfort and wishes of her husband ; the husband dislikes his home, and spends his evenings with idle companions at the public-house ; the children are neglected and growing up in disobedience,

idleness, and ignorance: poverty and misery reign in the home; and all the result of a first quarrel between two people who had not learnt to govern their tempers, although they had solemnly promised, in the presence of God and man, to love each other until death.

But to return to Hagar; the next thing the angel of the Lord said unto her was, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude." This promise is very like that made to Abraham, yet with this important difference: there is no special blessing promised, as in his case.

If we look at the next chapter (verse 18) we see Abraham pleading for Ishmael, in these few words: "O that Ishmael might live before thee." In answer to this petition, God said, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." The twelve princes here promised are twelve sons, whom we find Ishmael had, and from them descended twelve nations or tribes.

Then, thirdly, Hagar is told that her son's

name is to be Ishmael, which means "God shall hear," because, as the angel said, "The Lord hath heard thy affliction." What encouragement does this assurance give us to cry unto God in our troubles!

Poor Hagar, driven by Sarah's anger, from her only home, cries unto the Lord; the Lord, in mercy, hears her cry, and comes to instruct and comfort her. Yes, dear friends, even though we have sinned and wandered from the right path, yet may we pray unto God in the words of David: "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins." (Psalm xxv. 16—18.)

Lastly, we have the character given us of Ishmael and his descendants. "And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence (or face) of all his brethren." Do we not learn from this that God knows everything? future, as well as past and present? Yes, God knows what your children

will be, before they are born. How earnestly this should lead you to pray to Him, to guide and teach you how to train and manage them; because if God knows their tempers and dispositions, as well as their future calling in this life so much better than you do, He is so well able to help you. And then He has promised, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (in the margin). "I will counsel thee, mine eye shall be upon thee." (Psalm xxxii. 8.) You need never go wrong, if you would only just look to God, day by day, for help, instead of following your own will.

The Ishmaelites or Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, answer exactly, in the present day, to the description here given to Hagar. They are a wild and wandering people—they have no fixed habitation, as the people have in this country: no houses, no cities; but they live in tents, and wander from place to place, the dread and terror of the peaceable inhabitants of the land. They are robbers, whose hand is against every man, and therefore every man's hand is against them. The following extract will prove

the truth of what I have said :—" Not a spot of border land from Wady Muza to Aleppo is safe from their raids, and Druses, Moslems, and Christians are alike to them ; in fact their hand is against all. When the Anezeh come up in spring, their flocks cover that plain like locusts, and were it not for our rifles they would not leave us a hoof nor a blade of corn. To-day their horsemen pillage a village here ; to-morrow another in the Ghutah of Sham (Damascus) ; and the day following they strip the Bagdad caravan. Oh my lord ! these sons of Ishmael are fleet as gazelles, and fierce as leopards. Would Allah only rid us of them and the Turks, Syria might prosper ! " *

Hagar was, as you may suppose, greatly awed by this visit from the angel of the Lord : " And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me : for she said, have I also here looked after him that seeth me ? " Hagar is convinced that though she might flee from and get out of sight of her earthly mistress, she could not hide herself from the all-seeing eye of God. She had not thought of God in

* Professor Porter.

her wanderings, but His eye had been upon her; and now she will obey His word and return home to Sarah, her mistress, as she is commanded to do. We have no account of the reception Hagar met with on her return, but we may imagine that she had some humiliation to pass through, which she had now, we hope, learned to bear with meekness and submission. Soon after her return, her son Ishmael was born. When he was thirteen years old God commanded Abraham to be circumcised and all his house, and therefore, in obedience to this command, Ishmael was circumcised. The following year Isaac, the son of promise, was born. On the day of his weaning, when Abraham made a great feast, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." This naughty conduct of Ishmael decided his fate and that of his mother Hagar, for Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son."

The promised son having been given to Abraham and Sarah, and Ishmael being now fourteen years old, it appears that it was God's will that Hagar and her son should leave the home of Abraham, for we are told, "And God said unto Abraham, let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad and because of thy bond-woman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice, for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed." In obedience to this direction, "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away."

We have here an illustration of what the Lord Jesus Christ said to the Jews: "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." (John viii. 35.) Isaac, as the son of promise, and the heir, remains in his father's house, but the son of the slave is sent forth to shift for himself in the world. And Hagar "departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba;" but soon trouble comes,

the provisions given her by Abraham are finished, the water is spent in the bottle, and no more is to be obtained in the wilderness. Hagar now gives up in despair, she puts her child, faint and weary with thirst, under a shrub, and there leaves him to die. She has forgotten all God's promises about this son given to her before his birth; so she can do nothing but sit down and weep. How weak is unbelief! Hagar had been living by sight, without faith in exercise. This was easy, as long as she dwelt with Abraham's household, and all her wants were supplied; but now that trouble is come upon her, she is overwhelmed by it. "And she went and sat her down over against the child a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice and wept."

Is she left to perish in her distress? Oh, no! God had promised, and His word does not fail. "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold

him in thine hand." Thus was Hagar roused out of her despair by the voice of God, and her faith strengthened by the repetition of the promise: "for I will make him a great nation." And not only so, but the present need was supplied. "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink."

Water was thus given her in the wilderness; what she had not with her natural sight been able to see, is made visible to her by a more powerful, far-seeing sight being given to her. We gather from what is here said that it was Ishmael's cry of distress that the Lord heard, it was for him, specially, that the supply was given. Did Ishmael really pray to the Lord in his distress? Perhaps he did, for although we have no reason to suppose, from his conduct, that he was a child of God, yet those who in prosperity never call upon God, will in trouble sometimes cry unto Him; and we have instances of such prayers being answered; for example, in the 107th Psalm it is said: "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth

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all manner of meat ; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses." (verses 17—19.) But I am rather inclined to think that there was some one else praying for Ishmael. There is no doubt but that Abraham followed him with his prayers, and that it was Abraham's prayer that the Lord heard and answered.

Mothers, follow your children, your sons and your daughters, when they leave you, with fervent, faithful prayer. You cannot see or know the dangers and temptations to which they are exposed ; but you can pray that in all times of danger and temptation they may be delivered. You can pray the Lord to watch over them, and keep them from evil, that it may not grieve them. You can ask Him to supply all their need out of His rich fulness in Christ Jesus. Abraham's prayer for Ishmael was heard, for we are told : " And God was with the lad ; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer."

Hagar continued to live with her son in the wilderness of Paran, and when he grew up to manhood she "took him a wife out of the land

of Egypt," and this is the last thing we have recorded of her. It is plain that Abraham did not lose sight of Ishmael; because at his death we find Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, so that we may infer from this that although Hagar had trouble at the first, yet she was cared for by her master, and that she probably lived to an old age, though Scripture is silent as to the time of her death.

In all this story of Hagar, the bondwoman, we see so many evidences of the special care and kind Providence of our God in supplying the necessities of daily life, which should teach us that He is not unmindful of His creatures. His watchful eye is ever over *us*, for He is the same now as in Hagar's time. As He watched over and provided for *her*, so He will now for each of *us*. How beautifully is this described by the Lord Jesus Christ: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all

these things shall be added unto you.' (Matt.
x. 29—31 ; vi. 33.)

"THE birds without barn or storehouse are fed ;
From them let us learn to trust for our bread,
His saints what is fitting shall ne'er be denied,
So long as 'tis written : ' The Lord will provide.' "

"AMONG the deepest shades of night,
Can there be one who sees my way ?
Yes ;—God is like a shining light,
That turns the darkness into day.

" When every eye around me sleeps,
May I not sin without control ?
No ; for a constant watch he keeps,
On every thought of every soul.

" If I could find some cave unknown,
Where human feet had never trod,
Yet there I could not be alone ;
On every side there would be God.

" He smiles in heaven ; he frowns in hell ;
He fills the air, the earth, the sea :—
I *must* within his presence dwell ;
I *cannot* from his anger flee.

" Yet I may flee, he shows me where,
To Jesus Christ, he bids me fly ;
And while I seek for pardon there,
There's only mercy in his eye."

CHAPTER V.

THE PARTIAL MOTHER.

Genesis xxiv., xxv., xxvi., xxvii.

TO-DAY, dear friends, we have a very different story before us to the one we considered at our last meeting, for I am going to tell you about Rebekah the wife of Isaac. Her history begins in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis, and I am sure that we shall find it most interesting. Do you not think it is very kind and loving of our God to give us these beautiful stories of domestic life in the Bible? which the most ignorant of us may understand, because they are so full of power and teaching.

Isaac did not marry until after the death of his mother, Sarah; but as soon as she was dead and buried, Abraham begins to make arrangements for the marriage of his son.

The Canaanites, among whom Abraham dwelt, were idolators, and as he well knew, doomed to destruction, because their land had been promised to his descendants. He will not therefore permit Isaac to take a wife from among them, but he forms a plan to obtain a wife for him from his own family, which he had left behind in Ur of the Chaldees. As neither Abraham nor Isaac were permitted to go back to this place, the Lord having fixed their habitation in Canaan, Abraham engaged his eldest servant, or steward, by oath, to go and fetch a wife for his son, with the assurance that the God who had promised him the land of Canaan as his inheritance, would guide and prosper him in his journey. Abraham's steward, with the like faith to that which had given such assurance to his master, takes the oath required of him, and then immediately prepares for his journey. There was no railroad by which he could travel, but the journey must be performed riding on camels. The man chose ten of these animals, and probably as many men to guide them.

On his arrival at the city where Nahor, Abraham's brother, lived, he halted by a well outside

the city, and there he offered up this faithful, but simple prayer: "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

Can you not, my friends, see here what wisdom and calm dignity faith gives? This good man came to Mesopotamia a perfect stranger, and had he acted as we commonly do, he would, instead of waiting quietly upon God, have gone hurrying through the city to find the family he wanted to see, and would then perhaps have failed in his errand; whereas, now we see how God heard his prayer and prospered him in his work. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James v. 16);

for the narrative tells us: "And it came to pass before he had done speaking, that behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder."

Here we have Rebekah first introduced to us, and you see that she was grand-niece to Abraham, and therefore Isaac's cousin. In person she was fair to look upon; and she went down to the well and filled her pitcher and came up. Now the servant is anxious to see if his prayer be answered, and whether this young maiden is to be the wife of Isaac; so he ran to meet her, and said, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher." Then Rebekah said with a politeness common to her people and worthy of her great uncle Abraham, "Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink." And Rebekah was not satisfied with merely giving water to the steward, for it is said: "And when she had done giving him drink, she hasted and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels." The servant was, we may be sure, pleased with

the damsel, but he did not yet know who she was. "And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." When the camels had done drinking he said to her, "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor." And when she had told him who she was, "the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

Then Rebekah "ran and told them of her mother's house these things." Her brother Laban immediately ran out, and invited the servant to partake of his hospitality, in these characteristic words: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels." This invitation was thankfully accepted; but when he was come in, and they set

meat before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told mine errand." He then related to them for what purpose he was come, namely, to fetch a wife for Isaac, his master's son, also the particulars of his journey, his prayer, and how thus far the Lord had prospered him, and he ended with saying, "And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord, we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." Then the servant bowed his head and worshipped the Lord. And he made some rich presents to Rebekah, and to her mother and brethren; "And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, "Send me away unto my master."

Rebekah's relatives wished to detain her amongst them for at least ten days, but the servant said: "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord

hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master." So they said they would ask Rebekah if she were willing to go, and they said to her, "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said I will go." Then they offered no further obstacle, but allowed her to set out at once, after giving her their blessing. "And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah and went his way." As they drew near to Hebron, where Abraham dwelt, they met Isaac, and when the servant had told him all that he had done, Isaac took Rebekah, and brought her into his mother's tent, "and she became his wife and he loved her."

For twenty years after her marriage Rebekah had no children, "and Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife," and the Lord heard his prayer, and Rebekah became the mother of twin sons, whom they named Esau and Jacob. "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." We see that there was a great difference in the character of these two

brothers. The elder one, Esau, appears to have been of a bold, active spirit. He reminds us of the wicked Nimrod described in Genesis x. 9, as "a mighty hunter before the Lord;" while Jacob was evidently a man of quiet temper, but artful and cunning. "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob."

The reason given us by God, who knows the heart, for Isaac's preference for Esau is a very low and sensual one, namely, that "he did eat of his venison;" while Rebekah's partiality for Jacob may be accounted for in his quiet domestic habits, so much better suited to her womanly feelings. Perhaps, too, she had regard to the promise given her before the boys were born: "The elder shall serve the younger;" and so she looked upon Jacob as the one chosen of God to the inheritance of the land of Canaan. But, strange to say, Isaac appears to have lost sight of this choice of God altogether, as we shall see presently.

By right of birth, Esau was heir to the land of Canaan; but one day, when he came in hungry and tired from hunting, he sold his right

to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage that he was eating. By this act Esau showed what little value he set upon his birthright, for we are told: "He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright." And it is on this account that he is called "a profane person" in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." (Hebrews xii. 16.)

On the other hand, what crooked means were resorted to by Jacob, and also by his mother Rebekah, to secure that inheritance, already made sure to him by the word and promise of Almighty God!

In the next chapter of Genesis we are told: "And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech, king of the Philistines, unto Gerar. . . . And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked him of his wife, and he said, She is my sister; for he feared to say she is my wife, lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah, because she was fair to look upon."

Here we see Isaac, through unbelief, falling into the same sin that his father Abraham had done.

Abimelech the king, on finding out that Rebekah was the wife and not the sister of Isaac, "charged all his people, saying, he that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." So God took care of both Isaac and his wife, as it is said in the 105th Psalm: "He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; saying, touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." (verses 14, 15.) At the close of this chapter Esau's marriage amongst the Canaanites is mentioned, for he took two wives from the Hittites, "which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah." And another proof of the careless indifference of Esau with regard to the promised inheritance and blessing. Yes, my friends, Esau was living, like too many young men of the present day, in sin and pleasure, thinking only how he could best please himself without respect to his parents' wishes or the will of God.

Notwithstanding, we find Isaac still blindly adhering to his desires for Esau, his favourite

son, and determined, if possible, to give him the blessing. How strange that one who had shown in early life such faith and obedience, should now in old age have fallen so low in sensuality and unbelief. Does it not teach us that there was nothing in Isaac to recommend him to God any more than in ourselves? For that, in himself, he was a lost sinner, and therefore only saved by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We will now look at the events of the next chapter, which form the closing scenes in Rebekah's history. Isaac was now become blind with age, and he told his eldest son Esau to go hunting, and to get him some venison, which is the flesh of the deer, and to prepare some savoury meat, such as he liked, that he might eat of it, and he adds, "that my soul may bless thee before I die." Esau immediately went out, to do as his father had directed him.

But meanwhile Rebekah, who had heard what Isaac said to Esau, calls her son Jacob, and desires him to go to the flock and fetch two good kids that she may prepare some savoury meat for Jacob to take to Isaac, in order by subtilty to

obtain the blessing before his brother returns from hunting. Jacob objects to the plan from the fear of detection. He thinks his father will probably feel of him, and easily discover the deception, because his brother is a hairy man and he is a smooth man, and then, instead of receiving the blessing, a curse would fall upon him. But Rebekah, bent upon having her own way, at any cost, answers, "Upon me be thy curse, my son; only obey my voice, and go fetch me them."

Oh Rebekah! Rebekah! have you forgotten that the Lord, the Almighty God, has no need of your planning and deceit to bring about His own purposes? He has promised both the inheritance and the blessing to Jacob, and He can and He will fulfil His word! Is it necessary for you to sin, and to lead your child also into sin? Surely not. You will only bring trouble and sorrow upon yourself and your much-loved Jacob. And, my friends, Rebekah did bring upon herself much sorrow, as we shall find.

But to return to our story; we see that Jacob did not at all fear the sin into which his mother was leading him, he only thought of the danger

of being found out. He was not, like his son Joseph, who, when tempted by Potiphar's wife, said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. xxxix. 9.)

No; Jacob did not yet fear God, and therefore did not fear to tell a lie. So he did as his mother told him, he went and fetched the kids from the flock, and he allowed himself to be dressed in Esau's clothes and took every precaution to prevent discovery, even putting the skins of the kids upon his hands and neck, that they might feel hairy like his brother's. When all was ready, he went in to his father and said in answer to Isaac's inquiry, "Who art thou, my son?" "I am Esau thy first-born; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me." And Isaac said, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Then Isaac called Jacob to come near, and he felt his hands, and when he felt that they were hairy like Esau's hands, he said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And so Isaac was deceived,

and he blessed Jacob in these words : " See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed : Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine : Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee : be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee : cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

Just as Jacob was leaving his father, after having received this blessing, Esau came in with the meat which he had prepared ; and now Isaac discovered the treachery of his son Jacob. " And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who ? where is he that hath taken venison and brought it to me, and I have eaten it all before thou camest, and have blessed him ? Yea, and he shall be blessed. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father." But Isaac said to him, " Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing." Then Esau was very angry with Jacob, and

accused him of having before taken away his birthright, and now his blessing; and he so hated him that he determined when his father was dead, he would slay his brother Jacob.

When Rebekah heard this she was alarmed, and she said to Jacob, "Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore my son, obey my voice and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother, to Haran, and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away. Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done unto him: then I will send and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?"

After having thus poured out the feelings of her heart to Jacob, Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

Isaac immediately consents to Rebekah's wishes, and desires Jacob to go to the house of Bethuel, and take a wife of the daughters

of Laban, his mother's brother. And "Jacob obeyed his father and his mother," and he went away to Padan-aram as they desired; and Rebekah never saw her much-loved son again, for although we have no record of her death, it certainly took place before his return, which was twenty years after.

Thus we see, that a cloud hung over the latter years of Rebekah's married life, which had begun so brightly and happily! Before we close, let us take another glance at the events of the last chapter. There was much that was wrong in each member of this family. Isaac, from his blind partiality for Esau, desires to give him the blessing, although he knew that Jacob was, in the purpose of God, placed before his brother.

This determination of Isaac led to the sin of Rebekah and Jacob; not that it was any excuse for them, for they ought to have believed that God was able to bring about His will in His own way and time, and that even the obstinacy of Isaac could not hinder the fulfilment of the Divine word. Yes, my friends, God's grace triumphs over all man's sin and folly! Yet how

sad, how very sinful was the conduct of Rebekah, thus to try to deceive her aged blind husband ! And then she did not sin alone, she dragged Jacob also with her into the sins of lying and deceit, and she caused Esau to hate and desire to kill his brother ; thus he became a murderer in the sight of God, for " Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." (1 John iii. 15.)

Sorrow and trouble are always the result of sin ! Rebekah had sorrow, deep sorrow in the conviction that her son Jacob was lost to her, through her own fault, and she had not the consolation of ever seeing his face again in this world.

Jacob had twenty years of toil and trouble with his uncle Laban, by whom he was grossly deceived, before he returned to the land of promise, and the home of his fathers. You that are wives, beware of ever trying to deceive your husbands in the smallest matter ; better to bear hardship and reproof than to wander from the strictest line of truth and honesty. " Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another." (Lev. xix. 11.)

“The lip of truth shall be established for ever : but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”
“Lying lips are abomination to the Lord : but they that deal truly are his delight.” (Prov. xii. 19, 22.)

SAVIOUR of sinners, lend Thine ear,
Accept the mourner's plea,
And listening to my feeble prayer,
Descend and pardon me.
I'm sunk in sin, beset with grief,
Condemned by Thy decree ;
Thou, only Thou, canst give relief,
Oh ! Jesus, pardon me !
Thy bloody cross and garments stained
Augment my misery ;
I cry distressed, by love constrained ;
Oh ! Jesus, pardon me !
Beneath Thy cross I'll urge my cry,
Until my soul is free ;
Both night and day I groan and sigh,
Oh ! Jesus, pardon me !
'Tis done, 'tis done, I do believe,
I feel my soul is free ;
Thy great salvation I receive,
Yes ; Thou hast pardoned me.
And when I reach the realms above,
Where I Thy face shall see ;
I'll sing of that redeeming love,
Which saved and pardoned me !

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAITHFUL MOTHER.

Exodus i., ii.

THE next mother I intend to tell you about is Jochebed, who was the mother of Moses, the leader and lawgiver of the children of Israel, during their wanderings in the wilderness. But before I begin the story of Jochebed, I should like to glance at the previous history of the Israelites, that we may see how it was that she and her people came to live in the land of Egypt, and what was their condition at this particular period?

Jacob, as you well remember, left his father's house, in Canaan, and went to Padan-aram, to take a wife from the daughters of his uncle Laban. He chose Rachel, the youngest daughter; but Laban deceived him, and gave him

Leah, his eldest daughter ; the consequence was that Jacob had two wives, for as he loved Rachel very much, he afterwards married her. Jacob had twelve sons, and from them the nation of Israel descended. Joseph, the youngest son but one, was disliked by his elder brothers, on account of his piety, and also because his father shewed a preference for him, he being the eldest son of his favorite wife Rachel. In order to get rid of him, his brothers sold him as a slave, and he was carried into Egypt, where, after passing through many trials and changes, he was exalted by the king of Egypt to be ruler of the land.

At this time the land of Canaan, where Jacob and his family lived, was again visited with a severe famine, and hearing that corn might be obtained in Egypt, he sent his sons to buy some for their families. The result of this visit was, that Joseph sent for his father and the whole family, amounting at this time to nearly seventy persons, to come and live in Egypt, that he might provide for them.

After the death of Joseph, when the Israelites had very much increased, a cruel king reigned in Egypt, and he was afraid of the Israelites, so

he oppressed them, and tried to reduce their numbers, by making them work very hard. He set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens, "But the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied and grew." When the king found that they continued to increase, he commanded that all the male children should be killed by the nurses as soon as they were born; but the nurses feared God, and did not do as the king commanded. Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive." It is just at this period that our history of Jochebed begins.

In the second chapter of Exodus we are told: "And there went a man of the house of Levi and took to wife a daughter of Levi." The name of this man, as we find from other parts of Scripture, was Amram; "And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi." (Numbers xxvi. 59.) We see from this passage that Jochebed was the granddaughter of Jacob, for Levi, her father, was the son of Jacob. Jochebed had three children; her eldest son, Aaron, was born before the cruel

order was given to drown all the little boys ; but Moses, her second son, was not born until after the law had been made. With what anxiety she must have looked forward to the birth of this child ; sometimes, perhaps, she hoped that the babe might be a girl, as then it would be safe from the cruel hand of the destroyer ; and at other times she would form plans for its preservation, if it should be a boy. When the child was born, and she found it was a son, and as we are told “a goodly child, she hid him three months.” How greatly must the faith and courage of both Jochebed and her husband have been tried during these three months ! It is mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews : “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child ; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” (Hebrews xi. 23.) What was it took away their fear of the king’s commandment ? It was their confidence in God ; they had prayed Him to spare their child, and they now trusted in God to hear and answer their prayers. “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and his children shall have a

place of refuge." (Prov. xiv. 26.) At the end of three months, "and when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark (or cradle) of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink." This conduct of Jochebed seems almost presumptuous, that she should take her child down to the very river in which the king had commanded the infants to be drowned, and leave him there among the flags or rushes which grew by the river's side. I think you will say that she must have been mad to do such a thing; and indeed, to the eye of sense, it does seem madness; but Jochebed knew well what she was about, she knew that she had put her babe into the hands of the Almighty God, and she believed that He would take care of him, but she knew not how; so she told her daughter Miriam to watch, at a distance, to see what would happen. "And the daughter of Pharoah came down to wash herself at the river, and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it." Do you not think that Miriam must have watched

with great anxiety when she saw the princess, the daughter of the cruel king, coming towards the river? She could not tell but she might be as cruel as her father, and that she would not immediately desire her maids to throw the child into the river. But no; God, who has the control of all hearts, touched her's with pity and compassion; as we read: "And when she had opened it (that is the ark), she saw the child: and behold the babe wept, and she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrew's children." When Miriam saw that the princess's heart was softened with pity, she was not afraid to come forward; "Then she said to Pharoah's daughter, shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharoah's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother." We may imagine how quickly Miriam ran to fetch Jochebed, and with what haste they both came to the place where she had left the babe with the princess. "And Pharoah's daughter said unto her, Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it."

And now Jochebed returns home with joy and thanksgiving, to fulfil the trust committed to her. How tenderly, how lovingly she nursed him ! And with what care she trained him, and taught him the pure religion of Jehovah, the God of Israel. How fervently she prayed that this child, so wonderfully preserved from a watery grave, might be kept from evil, when he should be old enough to appear in Pharoah's idolatrous court. For we are told : "And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharoah's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and she said, Because I drew him out of the water."

There is a brief sketch given us of the life of Moses by St. Stephen, in the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. "And the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months, and when he was cast out, Pharoah's

daughter took him up and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." (Acts vii. 17—22.)

Do you think that Jochebed's training was successful and her faithful prayers heard? Was her son kept from the temptations of the court, and the idolatry of the Egyptians? Yes, indeed he was. God fulfilled His promise: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. xxii. 6.) Jochebed was richly blessed in all her children. Aaron, her eldest son, was a man of God, and was chosen of the Lord to be the first high priest of Israel. Miriam was a prophetess, and we find her occupying a distinguished position among the women of Israel in the wilderness, after they had passed through the Red Sea. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." (Exodus xv. 20, 21.)

But in Moses she was indeed very much blessed, and her prayers for him were abundantly answered, as you will see from what is said in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, "for he endured as seeing him that is invisible." (Heb. xi. 24—27.) And in the book of Numbers we have this testimony to the character of Moses: "Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." (Numbers xii. 3.) And again in Deuteronomy: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. In all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharoah and all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses

shewed in the sight of all Israel." (Deut. xxxiv. 10—12.) Whether Jochebed was privileged to live and see her son exalted to the high position assigned him by God, we know not, for after she had delivered up her child to the Egyptian princess, as we have seen, no further mention is made of her.

Jochebed and her husband lived in the time of Israel's trouble, and Amram was one of those poor slaves whose life was made bitter with hard bondage; and it was not until eighty years after the birth of Moses that the people were delivered by the mighty hand of God, so that in all probability both Amram and Jochebed had gone to their rest above, before the time of the nation's deliverance arrived. Yet in the midst of their trials whilst on earth, they had the comfort of seeing their children walking in the faith of the God of Israel, and of knowing that Moses, the child of so much anxiety and so many prayers, was enabled by God's grace, to resist all the temptations of Pharaoh's court, and to choose "affliction with the people of God," rather "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Yes, Moses could, by faith,

chose to be a poor Israelite slave, rather than an Egyptian prince : he could prefer to become an outcast and a wanderer in a strange land, rather than live in all the splendour and luxury of royalty in an idolatrous court : he could esteem reproach for Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt : he could say with David, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness ;" or with Paul, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." (Psalm lxxxiv. 10 ; Rom. viii. 18.) And why ? Because "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward ;" he looked not at the things that are seen, which are for time only ; but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal, and so he was willing to endure trouble, persecution, banishment, and the loss of all things in this world, that he might enjoy God's favour and the glory of eternal life in the world to come.

Dear friends, how different was Jochebed's experience from that of Rebekah, whose history we were considering last time. Rebekah, through

unbelief, forsook the path of truth and honesty, and wandered in the ways of deceit and falsehood. Jochebed, though troubled on every side, and placed in the midst of great temptation, yet by faith stood firm; and as a daughter of faithful Abraham, triumphed over the difficulties of her condition, and enjoyed a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. What a blessed thing is a life of faith and trust in God! Let me entreat you, if you have not faith, to ask for it. Faith is God's gift. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Eph. ii. 8.) Pray, "Lord increase our faith."

A widowed mother had two sons: both were the children of many prayers; but only one was walking in the right way. The eldest, when the restraint of his father's authority was removed, wandered further and further in the ways of sin. He was constantly to be found in all places of evil, and squandered his time and money in vice and gambling. His mother and brother prayed for him, and exhorted him to forsake his wicked course, and evil companions, but all to

no purpose. At length he enlisted for a soldier, into a regiment bound for India. His mother was tempted to buy him off, but he told her if she did, it would be of no use, he should enlist again, as he was determined to go. The poor mother then begged his brother to enlist into the same regiment, that he might still be near to watch over him, and succour him, in time of trouble; and when opportunity offered, to lead him to the Saviour. The brother consented, and they both left the poor disconsolate, but faithful mother: she followed them with her prayers and letters of loving advice and earnest exhortation. That mother did not live to see her children again in this world, but she has met them in heaven, for her prayers were heard, and her poor prodigal, before he died, was brought to the fold of Christ. His faithful brother watched by his dying bed, and pointed him to the Saviour of the lost. Mothers, never give up praying for your sons: you may have to wait long, and you may never on this side the grave see your prayers answered. For the trial of your faith, the answer may be long delayed: but be assured

"no prayer is lost." In heaven you will rejoice over your lost ones restored to you, and you will be able to say, "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me." (Isaiah viii. 18.)

We have referred to the state of bondage and slavery which the Israelites were in at this time. Their condition was such as we, in this country of freedom, cannot imagine; condemned to toil in making bricks and mortar and in building cities, under the heat of a burning sun much hotter than the hottest day with us; theirs was indeed a life of misery and hardship. A striking picture of that state of bondage and slavery to sin and Satan in which we all are by nature; the chains of this slavery being drawn more strongly and tightly about us every year we continue in sin—every day we refuse the invitation of Jesus Christ: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. xi. 28.)

Will you then, dear friends, continue in sin? You who have sold yourselves to work the works of Satan, will you not cry out to the Great

Deliverer as the Israelites did in Egypt? He will hear you, He will deliver you and save you. This is the message which the Lord sent by Moses to Israel: "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians. . . . Now therefore behold the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them." The Lord heard their cry, He saw their affliction, and He sent Moses to deliver them. And the Lord Jesus has come to work out a far greater deliverance for you, as He Himself declared, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (Luke iv. 18.) "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Matt. ix. 13.)

"LET worldly minds the world pursue ;
What are its dreams to me ?
Once I admired its trifles too,
But grace has set me free.

"Its pleasures now no longer please,
No more content afford ;
Far from my heart be joys like these,
Now I have found the Lord.

"As by the light of opening day,
The stars are all conceal'd ;
So earthly pleasures fade away,
When Jesus is reveal'd.

"Creatures, no more divide my choice,
I bid you all depart ;
His name, and love, and gracious word
Have fix'd my roving heart."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEREAVED MOTHER.

The Book of Ruth.

AFTER the people of Israel had settled in the land of Canaan, according to the promise of God made to Abraham, they were for a great many years governed by judges. It was under the rule of one of these judges that Naomi lived, of whom I am going to read to you to-day. Her history is to be found in the book of Ruth. It begins thus: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion."

You will remember that this is the fourth time that we have spoken of a famine in the land of Canaan. Once in the time of Abraham, and again in Isaac's life-time, and also in Jacob's, but then the Canaanites had possession of the land. Now Israel is settled in it, and yet there is famine. It may be well for us to inquire why these people, so favoured of the Lord, were visited with this calamity. My friends, I believe it was on account of their sins as a nation. They so often fell into idolatry, and worshipped the gods of the heathen, by whom they were surrounded, and then God punished them with war and famine, as He had threatened to do in these terrible words: "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction. I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin; the suckling also with the man of grey hairs." Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived and ye turn

aside and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you." (Deut. xxxii. 23—25; xi. 16, 17.)

I have told you before that sin always brings punishment; this is as true of nations as it is of men and women. Although Canaan was a very fruitful country, yet it was very dependent on, what is called in Scripture, "the former and the latter rain;" if these rains did not come in their proper season, then the corn could not grow, and a famine, or scarcity of food, was sure to follow. Elimelech, because of the famine, went to live in the country called Moab, with his wife Naomi, and his two sons. When they had been some time in Moab, Elimelech died, and Naomi became a widow, and her children fatherless, in this foreign country. After a time Mahlon and Chilion married women of Moab, "the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth." As Israelites, they ought not to have married these women, because the

Moabites worshipped idols instead of the Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel, and such marriages had been forbidden by the law of God, for we read in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy :
“ Neither shalt thou make marriages with them ; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.”
(Deut. vii. 3.)

When they had lived in the land of Moab ten years, the young men died, both of them, and Naomi was bereft of her sons as well as of her husband. This must indeed have been a time of great sorrow to her. Having heard “ that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread,” she determined to return home to her own country, “ Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her ; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.”

Dear friends, I want you to observe these words : “ The Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” It is God then who gives us bread. Yes, we may learn this from the Lord’s Prayer, where we are taught to say, “ Give us this day our daily bread.” Sometimes,

when work is scarce and provisions are dear, you find it hard to get bread for yourselves and your children, then you should remember this prayer to God, "Our Father in heaven," and trust in Him to supply your daily wants. "Bread shall be given you, your waters shall be sure." (Isaiah xxxiii. 16.) "The Lord will provide." When the widow Naomi had gone part of the way home, she said to her daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice and wept. And they said, surely we will return with thee unto thy people." But Naomi said, "Turn again my daughters: why will ye go with me?" And then she went on to tell them that she had no more sons to give them for husbands. For you must know, dear friends, that it was an established custom in Israel, by God's command, that when a husband died and left no children, that his next brother should marry his widow. This custom is mentioned in the New Testament.

"Moses said, if a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed unto his brother." (Matt. xxii. 24.) But Naomi had no more sons, and that is why she advised her daughters-in-law to return to their own people, and she added with great affection, "for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is against me." Like Jacob, poor Naomi was ready to say: "All these things are against me." (Gen. xlii. 36.) How prone we are all of us to feel thus when trouble comes; but instead of these things being against us, they are intended by our loving Father in heaven for our good. Why does a good mother punish her children when they do wrong? Because she loves them and wishes to see them better children, and doing what is right. So it is with God, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Heb. xii. 6.)

This was a sorrowful time for these three widows, for we are told, "And they lifted up their voice and wept again." "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." (Heb. xii. 11.) "Orpah kissed her mother-in-

law," and returned to her own people and to her false gods; but not so Ruth, she would not go, "Ruth clave unto her," she could not find it in her heart to leave the poor lonely one, so she said, in answer to Naomi's persuasion, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." "And when Naomi saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem," which place Naomi had left about ten years before with her husband and children. How different her condition now! Although she had been gone so long, her neighbours had not forgotten her: "And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?"

Though Bethlehem is here called a city, it was but a small place, what we should call a village or small country town; but it is evident

that Naomi had been a person of some importance there, for she was well known. Naomi means pleasant. When she heard them say, "Is this Naomi?" "she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara (that is bitter); for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" How deeply poor Naomi felt her loss; she had loved her husband and children very, very much! These earthly treasures had filled her heart; she went out full, but the Lord had taken away her treasures, and now she was empty. Naomi had given to them the love she ought to have given to her God, and that is why the Almighty had taken them away. He wanted her to obey the command: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. vi. 5.) If we love any creature more than we love God, we make that creature our idol, and we are guilty of idolatry. St. John says: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John v. 21.)

It was in the beginning of barley harvest, that is in the month of April, when Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, and as it was the custom for women to go out into the fields to glean up the scattered ears of corn, Ruth said unto Naomi, "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter." As they were poor, Naomi was, doubtless, glad for Ruth to go and get some corn to supply them with food. Elimelech and Naomi had possessed a piece of land, but they were obliged to sell it, so now they had nothing. Ruth went out to glean, and she was guided to a field which belonged to a rich man named Boaz, who was a near relative of Naomi's husband.

When Boaz saw Ruth amongst the gleaners, he inquired who she was, and being informed that she was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, he spoke kindly to her and said, "Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go after them: have I not charged the young men that they

shall not touch thee ? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn." Then Ruth "fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Boaz told Ruth that he had heard all about her kindness to Naomi since the death of her husband, and how she had left her parents and her country to come and live in this strange land, amongst a people who were strangers to her, and then he added these words : "The Lord recompense thy work and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Yes truly, Ruth had put herself under the care of the Lord God of Israel, for she had said to Naomi, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." And now she was reaping the reward of her faith and good conduct, as we are told by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy : "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;" and again : "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought

nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." (1 Tim. iv. 8; vi. 6—8.) Not only was Ruth permitted to glean in the field, but Boaz also invited her to share the food he had provided for his reapers, and he gave her so much parched corn that she had some to spare to take home for her mother-in-law. Ruth beat out the corn that she had gleaned, and there was about an ephah, or three pecks of barley. And she took it home to Naomi, and told her where she had gleaned it, and also of the kindness of Boaz. Naomi was very glad, and said: "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living, and to the dead."

Naomi also said, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen." (One that hath right to redeem, or buy back the land.) And she hoped that through Ruth's influence Boaz might be led to do this according to the custom in Israel: "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold." (Lev. xxv. 25.) Naomi told Ruth to continue

to glean in the field of Boaz all the time of harvest, and Ruth did as she was bid; "She kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, to glean unto the end of barley harvest, and of wheat harvest, and dwelt with her mother-in-law."

After the harvest was over, Boaz did as the law commanded, for he bought back the parcel of land, which Naomi had been obliged to sell, and he also took Ruth to be his wife. "And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day." And all the people and the elders answered, "We are witnesses." So Ruth became the wife of the rich man Boaz, and she had a son whom they named Obed. The birth of this child was a cause of great rejoicing to Naomi. And the women, her neighbours, said unto her, "Blessed be the Lord,

which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman (or redeemer) that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thy old age: for thy daughter-in-law which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it."

This child Obed was the grandfather of King David, of whose family our Lord Jesus Christ was afterwards born, at this very same town of Bethlehem, according to the prophecy of Micah: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting." (Micah v. 2.) So you see, dear friends, that Naomi was comforted in her old age, and I have no doubt but she was able to say with David: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "For thou art my trust from my youth." "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." (Psalm cxix. 71; lxxi. 5, 9.)

What a beautiful example of love and filial

piety we have in Ruth ! And it is the more remarkable as she was a daughter of Moab, a people who worshipped idols, and as such, we might have expected that she as well as Orpah her sister-in-law, would have gone back to her people and to her idols ; but she had learned to love the God of Israel, and that is why she loved Naomi, and wished to remain with her, and was enabled to fulfil her duty toward her in such an exemplary manner, according to the words of the New Testament : “ But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents : for that is good and acceptable before God.” (1 Tim. v. 4.) It is God’s will, dear friends, that we should be very kind to the widow. “ God careth for widows.”

But then He expects them to be “ well reported of for good works.” To be diligent followers of every good work : not idle, “ wandering about from house to house ;” not “ tattlers ” and “ busy bodies,” “ speaking things which they ought not.” Not gossiping about their neighbours’ business, but quietly labouring to get their own living in that state of life in which God has been

pleased to place them. O my friends, if all women would follow the example of Naomi and Ruth, how much mischief and sorrow would they be spared in this world, and what a blessed portion would they enjoy in the world to come ! I dare say you all think what a good thing it was for these poor women that they found such a friend as Boaz ; yes, it was a great mercy for them that God put it into his heart to be so kind, and made him willing to do the kinsman's part, to redeem the land and to take Ruth to be his wife. But I can tell you that God has graciously provided a better Friend for you, one who has already done the kinsman's part for you. What would the people of Bethlehem have thought of Ruth if she had refused to accept Boaz as the redeemer ? Would they not have said that she was very ungrateful, and not worthy of his kindness and love ? And what must God think of you, dear friends, if you despise that Redeemer whom He has sent for you ? As sinners, you are under the curse of God's broken law ; but " Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us : for it is written, Cursed is every

one that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. iii. 13.) As sinners you have lost all right and title to the heavenly inheritance; but Jesus has purchased for you "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter i. 4.)

As sinners you are the slaves of Satan and the world; but you are "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter i. 18, 19.) How then shall you escape if you "neglect so great salvation?" O flee unto Jesus, dear friends, while yet the door of mercy is open! Do not wait until death comes to call you away. You know how very suddenly some die. A poor woman, who was accustomed every week to attend a mothers' meeting, went to bed, as she thought, quite well, but was found dead in the morning. "Death came apparently without the slightest intimation, for her features and position were as calm and composed as though she had been in a sound sleep." Do not wait until the trumpet sounds, and the Lord comes,

“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. i. 8.) Come to Jesus, your Redeemer, *now*. “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb. vii. 25.) Jesus will not send away any who come to Him, for He has said, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.)

- “BEHOLD, the Redeemer is come!
He came with unspeakable love :
Performing the wonderful plan
Devis'd in God's wisdom above.
- “Compassion and pity are join'd
In Jesus, the sinner's best friend;
The cripple, the deaf, and the blind,
The helpless, He deigns to attend.
- “The widow is made to rejoice;
He speaks, and all creatures obey;
The dead hear His powerful voice,
And Satan's bereft of his prey.
- “The cities and villages hear
The gospel He came to proclaim,
The fruits of His labour appear,
And thousands rejoice in His name.
- “Then why do not sinners now flee
To Jesus for pardon and grace?
There is mercy for you and for me,
For all who in truth seek His face.’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PIOUS MOTHER.

1 Samuel i., ii.

I AM going to tell you to-day of one of the most interesting women we read of anywhere, namely, Hannah, the mother of the good little Samuel. She is the next mother whose history is given us after that of Naomi, and you will find it begins with the first chapter of the first book of Samuel. There we are told that a certain man named Elkanah "had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

Elkanah was a religious man, for "he went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh." The people of Israel were commanded to keep three

religious feasts to the Lord, and at these feasts all the men were obliged to leave their homes, and to go to the place which God had appointed, as it is written in Deuteronomy (xvi. 16, 17): "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall choose, in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he hath given thee." Two of these feasts were to be times of rejoicing, for it is said of the feast of weeks: "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God;" and of the feast of tabernacles: "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast." Then every one was to bestow gifts according as the Lord had prospered them, and to make the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow rejoice with them.

It seems also that husbands chose these times for giving portions to their wives and children, for we are told: "And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions.

But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion, for he loved Hannah."

Hannah was Elkanah's favorite wife, and he shewed his preference by giving her "a double portion," but with all this kindness from her husband, Hannah had a sore trial. She had no children, and this was a cause of triumph to Peninnah, who "provoked her sore, for to make her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb." And this continued year after year, so that poor Hannah became so sorrowful that "she wept, and did not eat."

You see here again the misery arising from Elkanah's following the evil custom so prevalent in the East, of having two wives. How much better and far happier is the rule of the Gospel, which has been God's rule from the beginning: "The husband of *one* wife," and "the wife of *one* man." (1 Tim. iii. 2; v. 9.) All God's laws are made for our good, and obedience to them is for our happiness, both in this world and in the world to come. When we, through following any evil custom, or the wickedness of our hearts, break these laws, and live in rebellion against God, we bring trial and sorrow upon

ourselves and others in this world. And sin, unrepented of and unpardoned, brings down eternal wrath and misery in the world to come. Are any of you, dear friends, living in sin and immorality? give up, I beseech you, your evil ways. God says to you: "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah i. 16, 18.) "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John i. 7.)

But to return to Hannah; her grief was a cause of sorrow to her kind husband, and he said to her, "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" Hannah made no answer, but she did the best thing for any woman to do in her trouble, "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed

look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but will give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."

Eli, the high priest, was sitting in "the temple of the Lord," and he observed Hannah as she thus prayed silently; for "she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she was drunken." It appears from this remark that the Israelites were in the habit of praying aloud in the temple, or this conduct of Hannah would not have excited such surprise, and caused Eli to say to her, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee." Hannah answered Eli very meekly, for she said: "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."

"A daughter of Belial," or "a son of Belial,"

is an expression rather common in Scripture, and it means a very naughty or wicked person, one who has given himself up to do the works of the devil. A drunken woman was regarded as "a daughter of Belial," or a child of the devil. Hannah was not a woman of this sort, and of that Eli was very soon convinced, as we see by what he said to her next: "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast ask of him."

Hannah received these words of Eli as a message from God; she believed that her prayer was heard, so she "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

The next day "they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned and came to their house to Ramah." "The Lord remembered Hannah," and the following year her son was born, and she called him Samuel, which means "Asked of God," saying, "Because I have asked him of the Lord." As the women were not obliged to go up to the feasts at Shiloh with their husbands, Hannah, after the birth of Samuel, determined to remain at home until her child was old

enough to go with her, for she intended to fulfil her vow and leave him at Shiloh under the charge of Eli, the high priest, that he might be given to the service of the Lord "all the days of his life." And so, "She said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child is weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever." Elkanah permitted his wife to remain at home, as she thought it best, for he said to her: "Do what seemeth thee good, tarry until thou have weaned him, only the Lord establish his word."

When Samuel was about six years old Hannah went up to Shiloh, and "took him up with her," and they "brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also, I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

When Eli heard what Hannah said, "he worshipped the Lord there." How different are Hannah's feelings now to what they had been

the last time she saw Eli. Then she was full of grief and sorrow, now she is full of thankfulness and joy. She loved her child fondly and truly, but she loved her God more. She looked upon her child as the gift of God, for she said: "The Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him;" so that she was but giving back what the Lord had given her. She lends her Samuel for the Lord's use and service, and she does this with a steady and fixed purpose, for observe, dear friends, she says: "as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." The Lord graciously accepted the child, and Hannah was blessed and happy.

In the next chapter we have Hannah's inspired song of praise, written for our instruction. This song is a remarkable prayer, and such as no woman could have prayed, but by the teaching and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I will read it to you quite through. "And Hannah prayed, and said: My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee:

neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogance come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich. He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dung hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give

strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed."

First, you see, Hannah praises the Lord for His goodness in giving her this enlargement over her enemies, and rejoices in the salvation of the Lord.

Secondly, she speaks of the holiness of the Lord, and says: "There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside thee." As Moses said: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus xv. 11.)

Thirdly, she speaks of the infinite knowledge of God, and says: "For the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed."

Oh! let us think of this, God knows *each* of *us*; and God weighs our actions! If you buy something at the shop, and afterwards weigh it, and find that it is short weight, you would say the shopkeeper was dishonest, and you would buy no more of him. But oh! what a solemn thing it will be to have all our actions weighed in God's scale, and by His standard! In the book of Daniel we are told of a king to whom

God said, in a writing on the walls of his palace :
“Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.”

“In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain.” (Daniel v. 27, 30.) Yes, my friends, there is a time coming, and it may be very soon, when you and I and all mankind must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, when we must give an account of *ourselves* to God, and when every one of us shall be judged according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil.” “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. v. 10.)

Fourthly, Hannah speaks of the providence of God—His care of His own people, and the punishment of the wicked ; she tells us all things are ordered by God, that “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” Death and resurrection are in God’s hand. Again, “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich : he bringeth low, and lifteth up.” It is not by chance or accident

that one man is rich and another poor ; all these things are by God's appointment, for " He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou ?" (Dan. iv. 35.)

God's care of His people is expressed in these words : " He will keep the feet of his saints." See also what David says in the 91st Psalm : " Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation ; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Psalm xci. 9—12.)

God's providential care is wonderful, it passes all our thoughts or understanding ! You cannot understand how you have been kept alive, in sickness and in health, ever since you were born. You do not know how it is that the food you eat nourishes and strengthens you ; nor how the medicine you sometimes take, heals your sickness and you get well again. It is a mystery

to you that all your limbs do the bidding of your will. Your feet walk, your hands work, your tongue speaks.

Dear friends, it is God above who has provided all these things for our comfort, convenience, and necessities. Will you not praise the Lord as Hannah did ? and say in the words of David : “ What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me ? ” (Psalm cxvi. 12.)

Lastly, Hannah speaks of the punishment of the wicked : “ The wicked shall be silent in darkness ; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces ; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them : the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth.” I think, dear friends, we too often forget that by the wicked are meant : First, those who forget God and live on in sin, growing more vile in His sight every day they live ; such are spoken of in the book of Revelation, in these awful words : “ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone : which is the second death.” (Rev.

xxi 8.) And, secondly, those who live decent lives outwardly, who have the form of religion ; they go to church on Sundays, they are honest, steady, and industrious, as far as their neighbours can see, but alas ! they have no love to Jesus—no faith in Him as their Saviour, but they are rather trusting in their own works to find acceptance with God ; they are like those Jews described by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans : “ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” (Rom. x. 3.) Man’s righteousness, or good works, are compared by the prophet Isaiah to “ filthy rags,” and as such they are worth nothing in the sight of God.

And so, dear friends, whatever be your state, you must, if you would be saved in the day of judgment, come to the Lord Jesus ; you must be washed, pardoned, and cleansed from all your sins by His atoning blood. “ If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous : and he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for

the sins of the whole world.” (1 John ii. 1, 2.) These are the principal points in Hannah’s song of praise ; we will now resume her history.

In the eleventh verse of this chapter we are told : “ And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.”

Then we have described, as if in contrast, the wicked conduct of Eli’s sons, who were, it is said, “ sons of Belial ; they knew not the Lord.” And by their wickedness as priests under their father, they caused the sacrifices to be abhorred ; for we are told : “ Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord : for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. But the child Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover, his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.”

Again we have more said of Eli’s wicked sons and of their father’s speaking to them about it : “ Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them. And the child Samuel grew

on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men." How simple, and yet how faithful, is this Bible narrative! Here we have the children of the pious Eli leading a wicked life, a disgrace to their father and to their office as priests. How are we to account for this? The answer is found in the next chapter, where the Lord says, in speaking of Eli, "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Yes, here is the secret: "he restrained them not." Eli spoke to his sons about their sinful conduct, but he did not restrain them when they were children, he let them have their own way, and so they went on from bad to worse, until the judgment of God fell upon them and they were both slain "in one day."

But Samuel, dedicated by his pious mother to the service of God, before he was born, and trained by her in his early childhood in the fear of God, grew in favour with God and with men. As the Lord says in the same chapter: "For them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

The last notice we have of Hannah is in verses 20 and 21: "And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home. And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord." So Hannah was, you see, richly rewarded for her self-denial in giving up her firstborn child to the ministry of the temple service; she had not only the privilege of seeing Samuel grow up the honoured servant and prophet of the Lord, but she had five other children given her, which was considered a high privilege amongst her people in those days, as barrenness was felt to be a curse. It is remarkable that the same feelings exist in the present day amongst the inhabitants of the East, as the following melancholy story, related by Professor Porter, will show:—

"One of the richest and most enlightened merchants of the city (Damascus) married a beautiful girl, the pride of her family and of a large circle of friends. Years passed, but no children blessed the happy union. In the East

this is deemed now, as in the days of Abraham, one of the most serious calamities. A childless house is supposed to have a curse upon it.

“Disappointment and sorrow so preyed upon the mind of the young wife that her health gave way and she drooped like a flower. She was recommended by her friends and spiritual advisers to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Saidnāya. She did so. For a whole day and night she sat on the cold marble before the idol; she was carried out insensible, and in a few days she was a corpse!”

The idol here mentioned is a pretended picture of the Virgin Mary, said to have been painted by St. Luke, but no one is allowed to see it, because the monks of the Greek church say, “None could look on that picture and live.”

How much happier, than this poor victim of a corrupt church, was Hannah; she knew and loved the one true and living God, and she went straight to Him in her trouble, as we have seen, and the Lord heard her prayers. May you, dear friends, always follow her example, trusting in the promise: “Call upon me in the day of

trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalm l. 15.)

"How vainly would you seek to hide
From God's all-piercing view;
His eyes are as a flame of fire,
To search you through and through.

"Well may you tremble then to die,
While sin is unforgiven;
For no uncleansed, unpardoned soul
Can dwell with God in heaven.

"But listen to the gracious plan
The gospel brings to view,
How God, the holy and the just,
Became a Saviour too.

"A new and living way to Him
Was opened on the cross,
When Jesus suffered willingly
The wrath deserved by us.

"He loves to wash poor sinners clean
In His most precious blood,
And make them fit to stand in peace
Before a holy God.

"And they shall spend eternity
Beneath their Saviour's smile;
A brighter home than Eden theirs,
Where nothing can defile."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WIDOWED MOTHER OF ZAREPHATH.

1 Kings xvii. xviii. 1—6.

IN the seventeenth chapter of the first book of Kings we have written all that we know of the widowed mother of Zarephath. The particular period of her history, which is given us, is when the Israelites were in great trouble, under the reign of their very wicked king Ahab, whose character is thus described in the sixteenth and twentieth chapters of this same book :

“ And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”

As a punishment for the wickedness of this king and his people, the Lord sent a famine upon the land, and Elijah the prophet was commanded to deliver the following message to king Ahab: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And so great was the distress for food of all kinds, caused by this judgment, that we find from the next chapter that king Ahab himself and Obadiah, the governor of his house, travelled over the land to search for grass, to save, if it were possible, some of the horses and mules; for it is said: "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

Ahab and his wicked queen Jezebel were, as you may suppose, very angry indeed with Elijah, the good prophet of the Lord, for pronouncing this judgment upon them, and they would have

killed him, if the Lord had not hidden him and taken care of him. "And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." The prophet did as the Lord commanded: "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook." But after a time "the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land;" and then it was that the prophet received this direction: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Do you not think it was strange that Elijah should be told to go to a *widow* in this time of distress and scarcity? It would have appeared to us, and perhaps to him, much more reasonable if the Lord had said: "Arise, go to one of the rich merchants of Zidon, for I have disposed his heart, out of the abundance which I have given him, to provide for thy necessities." But, dear

friends, the Lord's thoughts are not like our thoughts, nor his ways like our ways." (See Isaiah lv. 8, 9.) He says: "Go to Zarephath, behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee there."

Mark the prophet's faith, he made no objection; he did not say in the pride and unbelief of the natural heart: "How is it possible, in this time of famine, that a poor widow should have food to give me? she must want all that she has for herself; besides, I should not like to be a burden upon her." No, he just did as the Lord told him: "So he arose and went to Zarephath." But now another question might arise in his mind, "How am I to know this particular widow to whom I am sent?" Perhaps Elijah followed the example of Abraham's servant, and prayed to the Lord that the woman to whom he was sent might come out to meet him as Rebekah did. But whether he did so we are not told. "And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks." If we did not know that the providence of God orders all things for His people, we should be ready to say, How curious it was

that this woman should be near the gate just as the prophet was coming in! Elijah did not, however, appear to think it strange or curious. His faith in God's word led him to feel that it was quite as natural for the woman to be there, as if he had written a letter and told her to come and meet him at the gate.

So "he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." Elijah must have known that water was very scarce, for he had just come from the dried-up brook of Cherith, and yet he did not hesitate to try this woman, by asking her for some; and when he saw that she made no objection to give him water, "as she was going to fetch it, he called to her and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand." This was more than the poor woman felt she could do; so now she tells him the sad tale of her poverty in the following simple but touching words: "And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may

eat it, and die." Elijah's faith is not shaken by this explanation, he knows that nothing is "too hard for the Lord," and as a faithful prophet he "said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Perhaps it may appear to you that the prophet was selfish in asking her to make a cake for him *first*. The reason for this was evidently to try the widow's faith. If she did as he told her, it would be a proof that she believed the word and promise of the Lord, which the prophet gave her. And we find the woman did believe, for "she went and did according to the saying of Elijah." It is difficult to imagine what her feelings were as she kneaded the little cake for the prophet. Perhaps her heart smote her, that she was giving away what her child so much needed; and her mother's affection might suggest, Was she right? But faith and obedience

to that strange-looking but holy man, prevailed. She had no cause afterwards to regret that she had done as she was bid, for she and her son and the prophet "did eat many days, or a full year. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

So you see, dear friends, God can and He does even create bread, if it be needful, to supply the wants of His people who trust in Him. You know that the Lord Jesus, when upon earth, did this for the multitudes that followed Him. St. Matthew tells us in the fourteenth chapter of his gospel, that "five thousand men beside women and children," were fed with only "five loaves and two fishes." And again, in the fifteenth chapter, he speaks of four thousand being fed with "seven" loaves and "a few little fishes." In both cases, bread must have been created, because there was enough and some to spare, for after the meal was over, the disciples gathered up the fragments which were left, and filled, in the first case, "twelve baskets," and in the second "seven baskets."

These miracles prove that the Lord Jesus Christ is the same God as the Lord God of Israel, in whose name Elijah spoke; and St. Paul tells us, in his epistle to the Hebrews, that "Jesus Christ" is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." (Hebrews xiii. 8) What He did for Elijah and the poor widow, in the Old Testament times, and what He did for the multitudes who followed Him when on earth, He can do now for us. Perhaps you will say, yes: but we do not hear of miracles now-a-days, that time has passed away. True, God works more now by ordinary means, yet His promises never fail, for it is written: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Psalm xxxvii. 3.)

I heard of a poor widow the other day who was formerly in much better circumstances, but is now keeping a little school for the support of herself and her child. She had lost some of her pupils, and her little girl was ill, yet she writes, in a letter to a friend, "The Lord is very gracious, I can speak of His love, and desire to praise Him. He is not unmindful of me, for last Saturday a brown-paper parcel was thrown

in, containing five shillings. I know not from whom it comes, at present; I have had also some tea and sugar given me." God provides food for all His creatures, and it is too often our own fault if we are in want. Idleness and sloth are sometimes the cause, as we find from the description of the sluggard, given us by Solomon in the book of Proverbs: "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish, but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." (Prov. vi. 9—11; xx. 13; x. 3, 4.)

Drunkenness, too, brings trouble and misery. How many thousands has the love of drink brought to ruin? "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who

hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them." (Prov. xxiii. 29—32; Is. v. 11.)

Yes, my friends, you may rely upon it, that sin of some kind or other is the cause of all the want, distress, and trouble that are in the world; from our first mother Eve down to the present time, sin has brought God's curse with it. Have faith in Jesus, the Great Sin Bearer, and you shall be redeemed from its curse. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John i. 29.) Now let us return to the history of this mother of Zarephath.

You recollect that for a whole year the widow and her son, with the prophet, were miraculously fed from the handful of meal in the barrel and the little oil in the cruse. Thus, day by day, their faith was kept in exercise, like that of the Israelites in the wilderness when the manna

was sent, with the dew, from heaven every morning, except on the Sabbath, when they were supplied by a double portion being sent the day before. (See Exodus xvi.)

But now a heavier trial comes upon the poor widow. "And it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick, and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him." The poor mother, in her distress, comes to the prophet, "And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

Let us consider for a few moments this question of the poor woman. It appears that although she had, for a whole year, been fed by a miracle, and had had daily intercourse with the prophet, she did not, until this moment, recognize him as a "man of God." She had been going on smoothly and comfortably enough, perhaps taking her daily supply of food, as if it had come in the common course of things. But now that her child has sickened and is dead, she is roused from a state of indifference, and she

cries out in her distress, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

Was it some particular sin that she now remembers—that now stares her in the face, in all its hatefulness and guilt? Or was it the sins of her whole past life that now, for the first time, come to her remembrance, as she looks upon the corpse of her dead child? Perhaps the Spirit of God was dealing with her as He did with the woman of Samaria, when she said of Jesus, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John iv. 29.) Dear friends, it is a great mercy when God deals with you thus, when He makes known to you, by the Holy Spirit, that you are sinners, for then there is blessing in store for you—the great blessing of pardon and salvation, through the death and merits of a crucified Saviour.

This poor widow did not lie down in despair, when she felt the hand of God thus heavy upon her: she went to the prophet; and yet, like Peter, she was ready to say: "Depart from me

for I am a sinful woman." (See Luke v. 8.) Elijah pitied her and was willing to help her. "And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And she took him out of her bosom, and he carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the Lord and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother; and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth."

There was something remarkable in this prayer of Elijah; let us just look at it. We see, first, that Elijah, although a great prophet, was but "a man," as St. James says, "subject to like passions as we are." (James v. 17.) He had no power in himself to raise this dead child to life. He could not say, as the Lord Jesus did,

“Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” (Luke vii. 14.) He could only cry unto the Lord, and say: “I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.” Yet what strong faith the prophet must have had to have asked such a thing, for it is the first miracle of the kind—the first time that a dead body was restored to life, therefore it was a great thing for him to ask, and he did not ask in a doubtful spirit; he knew that the Lord God of Israel is the Almighty God, and therefore able to do all things. He knew that He, who had once given life to this child, could restore that life. I think his faith was something like Abraham’s, when, at the command of God, he was ready to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. “Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.” (Hebrews xi. 19.)

God always puts honour upon faith, so God heard Elijah’s prayer, the widow’s son was raised to life, and her heart made glad, and she said: “Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.” Do you not see, my friends, what a blessing it was to this poor woman, that

the prophet had come to her dwelling! We have seen how, through his means, her daily bread had been supplied; but she had a greater blessing still, a blessing to her soul, for she was taught there is something more than the food for the body to be thought of; as "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. iv. 4; Deut. viii. 3.) By the death of her son she was led to see her own sinfulness in the sight of God. By his resurrection to life she was brought to believe in the truth of God's word, and her soul, which before was dead, was made alive to God. She learnt what resurrection means.

And in the son of this poor woman we may see a type of Him "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 25.) Even Jesus who "was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." I do not think that this woman ever took pleasure in her sins after this; I quite believe she became a different character. She believed God's Holy Word to be truth; she obeyed that word, and henceforth she "turned

to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (1 Thess. i. 9.)

Will you pray the Lord to teach you, by His Holy Spirit, that you too may become "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vi. 11.)

"OH! think upon the Saviour kind,
As on the cross He hung;
And ask, what means that bitter cry
From His most holy tongue?

"It was that He, who knew no sin,
Stood in the sinners' place,
Drank the fierce wrath of God, and felt
The hiding of His face.

"What caused the holy Son of God
To stoop so very low?
What brought Him from His glory bright
To bear this weight of woe?

"'Twas love, 'twas love to ruined man,
Whose sin He deigned to bear,
That sinners, through His death of shame,
Eternal life might share.

"Oh! can you doubt this Saviour's love,
And hear Him plead in vain?
Or seek, in earth's polluted streams
Your happiness to gain?

"His word of grace is very nigh,
This day it speaks to you;
Believe, and you with joy shall find
Its endless blessing true."

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTHER IN DEBT.

2 Kings iv. 1—7.

You will remember, dear friends, that in the last chapter I told you a good deal about the prophet Elijah. Perhaps you know that this holy man was afterwards taken up to heaven, without dying, in a chariot of fire. We find an account of this wonderful event in the second chapter of the second book of Kings. Elisha, the prophet's servant, was with him at the time. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that behold there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Happy Elijah! to be thus taken from earth to heaven, without the pains of dying! This was, methinks, a foreshadowing

and type of what will happen when the Lord Jesus comes again in His glory; for then all those who are ready, and looking for His appearing, "shall be caught up . . . in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. iv. 17.) Elisha, who saw his master thus ascend to heaven, became now, by God's command, a prophet in his stead, and a double portion of Elijah's spirit is given to him, in answer to his request: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy Spirit be upon me."

I have given you this short account of these prophets, because the next two narratives are so closely connected with the history of Elisha.

The mother of whom we are now going to read was the wife of one of the sons of the prophets, and she came to Elisha, and said, "Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

What a history of sorrow and trouble is contained in these few words: "My husband is dead, and the creditor is come to take unto him

my two sons to be bondmen." We see that this woman had not only become a widow, but that she was poor and in debt, and the creditor, that is, the man to whom she was indebted, was hard-hearted and cruel; for, as she had nothing to pay him with, he wanted to take her two sons to be his bondmen or slaves, thus they would become his property, and he would have power to sell them or to do just what he liked with them. This custom of making slaves of debtors was common amongst the heathen nations, especially with the Romans, and they were very cruelly treated by them; but it was forbidden by the law of Moses, as we read in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus: "And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee, thou shall not compel him to serve as a bondservant; but as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile, and then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the

land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen."

We will observe the reason this poor woman gives why the prophet should help her in her distress, she says of her husband: "Thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord." This is her plea, she said nothing in her own behalf, she does not praise herself; but for her husband's sake she begs help. And indeed here was a good reason, for although we ought to follow the example of Him who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. v. 45.) Yet we must also observe the apostolic rule: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. vi. 10.)

If any of you, my friends, have husbands that fear the Lord, be very thankful for such a blessing, and do all you can to help them on in the right way. Remember, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever." (Psalm cxi. 10.)

“The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” (Psalm ciii. 17, 18.) Your children will have a blessing or a curse through you and your husbands. A blessing, if you fear the Lord ; and a curse, if you do not. As we are told in the second commandment, “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me ; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” Now let us see how the prophet helped this poor woman. “And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee ? tell me, what hast thou in the house ? And she said, thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil.”

Her condition was quite as bad as that of the poor widow of Zarephath, she had nothing at all equal to her necessity. A single pot of oil could not pay her debt. How then could she satisfy her creditor ? How could she save her children from slavery ? She must follow the directions

given her by the prophet, and in doing this there is an exercise of faith and obedience. She had come to the prophet because she believed that he could help her, so now she is ready to do his bidding, however strange it may seem to her. "Then he said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full." She did not question with him, that, as she had but one pot of oil, how could she fill a number of empty vessels? She had, no doubt, heard how the little oil in the cruse at Zarephath had been increased day by day, and she knew that God could increase her oil too, if it were His will. "So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her, and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed."

Here we have another instance of the

wonderful creating power of God : for you must recollect that it was God, not the prophet, who increased the oil. Elisha had no power in himself to do this any more than Elijah had. They were both but men. Men cannot create. You and I can make things, if we have something to make them of ; but God alone can make things out of nothing. As we are told : “ In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen. i. 1.) This good woman, having thus obtained a large supply of oil, “ came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.” So you see her trouble was removed, she was able to pay her debt ; and her sons were delivered from becoming bondmen to the creditor. And there was, too, some oil to spare for their future support.

Thus was the woman’s prayer answered and her faith rewarded. For our God is “ always more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve.” Here ends all that is written of this woman ; the remainder of her history is not given us. Although we are not told so, we may

be quite sure that she never forgot the prophet's kindness, nor the wonderful miracle wrought on her behalf, and to the end of her life she was grateful to her God for His mercy and love thus shown to her. I think, my friends, in this interesting incident we have a remarkable picture of our own condition as debtors or sinners before God ; and of the rich and abundant grace provided for us in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us look, first, at our own state as debtors. The law of God requires perfect, unsinning obedience ; this we have not rendered. Every one of us, from the time that Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden, has been a transgressor of God's holy law. By our sinful thoughts, words, and actions we are daily adding to the great debt. Could you, my friends, feel the burden of this debt, you would indeed be ready to sink under its weight ! Could you see the terrors of this broken law, ready with its curse and wrath against you, as the poor mother saw the traitor ready to seize her two sons, you, like her, would plead for mercy ! You would cry out as the jailer at Philippi did,

“What must I do to be saved?” (Acts xvi. 30.)
How then may you and I be rid of this debt?
How may we escape the power and wrath of
our creditor? Can we pay the debt? Have we
anything to give that will satisfy our creditor?
If we now leave off sinning, and from this
moment keep the law perfectly, not offending in
one single thought, word, or deed, will that pay
the debt of past sins? Oh, no! Were it pos-
sible for us to do this, there is still the great
debt standing against us. For you know, that
if from this day, you pay ready-money at the
shop for everything you buy, yet if your name
is in the book for some things that you have
already had, but never paid for, the paying
steadily for what you get now will not clear off
the old debt. No, there it stands against you,
and the shopkeeper may at any time come down
upon you for the money, and if you have none
to pay him with, he can seize upon your furni-
ture, and strip you of all you possess; and it
will be of no use your pleading, in the face of
the law, that you have for some time past been
paying ready-money for all that you have bought
at the shop. This may seem hard, but it is quite

just, for you know, that you are as much bound to pay the old debt as you are to pay for the goods that you get at the present time. Just in the same way, no obedience that we might render to God's law now, or in the future, can ever free us from the guilt of our past sins, or lessen the great debt we owe to God.

Justice can do nothing but condemn the sinner. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel xviii. 4.) "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." (Rom. iii. 20.) Again, you may be very much ashamed and very sorry that you ever got into debt. And until you can pay the shopkeeper, you do not care to go to his shop. No, you would rather go anywhere else and spend your money, than face the man to whom you owe the debt: you are afraid that he should ask you for it. You know and feel that you have wronged him, and that makes you uncomfortable.

I am sure that every honest man and woman would feel very sorry to be in debt, and not be able to pay, and would say: "If I had known that I should not have been able to pay for the

things, I would never have bought them. I repent enough of it now."

But although it is quite right to be sorry, yet sorrow and repentance will not pay your debt. You may weep day and night, but tears will not pay it.

Again, you may try to forget it, and remove to another place, and so get away from your creditor, but you are in debt still. Nothing but paying down the money can set you free.

This is just the case with the sinner. He may be sorry for his sins; he may wish that he had not done many things that he has done. Yes, he may truly repent, but his repentance will not pay his debt to God. His repentance, however sincere, can never wipe out the guilt of a single sin. Or he may try to forget his sins, as I am sure many of you do. He may try to hide himself from God, as Adam and Eve tried to do after they had sinned, amongst the trees in the garden of Eden; but he is a sinner still, under the just condemnation of God's broken law.

But suppose some kind person who is rich enough comes forward and offers to pay your

debt at the shop, yes, every farthing that you owe. You accept the generous offer, and now you can go to that shop again with a light heart; you can look in the face of the shop-keeper without fear, because your debt is paid, and you are free! Well, my friends, this is just what the Lord Jesus has done for the sinner. When God saw man's lost and ruined condition by sin, He provided a way in which His justice could be satisfied, and man released from his great debt; and thus "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. v. 20, 21.)

Yes, my friends, Jesus came down from heaven and paid the sinner's debt, not with silver and gold, but with His own "precious blood," which He shed upon the cross for our redemption. He is the friend who has paid the debt, and set the debtor free.

"He dies to atone
For sins not His own,
Your debt He hath paid, and your work He hath done,
Ye all may receive
The peace He did leave,
Who made intercession, 'my Father forgive.'"

A poor negro, living on the coast of Africa, was much distressed and troubled about his sins; he went to several persons for advice, but could get no help. One day, as he was sitting alone by the sea coast, some English sailors came ashore to get water. They heard the poor negro groaning, as if in pain, and they went up to him, and one of them said: "Hallo, shipmate! what's the matter with you?" The poor fellow began to tell them his sad tale, but was soon stopped by the sailor's saying to him, "Oh, I see what's the matter with you, you must go to England, and there you'll hear of the Christian's God, who paid the debt." The negro did not forget what the sailor said, but determined to go to England, and after some time got leave to work his passage over on board a ship bound for this country. On his way he often asked one and another of the sailors, "Please massa, you told me where Christian's God is, dat pay de debt." The sailors, being either careless or wicked men, only laughed at him, and thought he was mad. When the ship arrived at London, the negro was put ashore, and then as the poor fellow

wandered from street to street he frequently said in a melancholy tone to those he met, "Please massa, you please tell poor black man where is Christian's God, dat paid de debt." Although some pitied him and gave him money, no one could or would answer his question, and so the poor negro found himself as badly off in England as in Africa : and he would sometimes steal away by himself, and give vent to his feelings in his own simple language. "Oh ! me no hear of Christian's God dat pay de debt ; me walk, walk, day, day, but me no hear. White man tell me in Africa, go to England, but me no find ; me go back, me die here !" A gentleman who one day overheard him thus bemoaning his sad disappointment, spoke to him and directed him to go in the evening to a place where he would hear about the Christian's God. The poor fellow went, and there he heard the same gentleman preach a sermon, in which he explained how Jesus Christ came to pay the sinner's debt by dying on the cross, to atone for his sins, and that now He had ascended up to heaven, and had sent him to tell poor sinners that He invites them to come to

Him, and says to them : " Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Long before the end of the sermon the poor negro, taught by the Spirit of God, received the truth into his heart, and was heard to say, in whispering tones, " Me have found Him ! me have found Him ! the Christian's God, dat pay de debt." After the sermon was over, the minister had some further conversation with him, and was glad to find him in such a happy frame of mind. As soon as an opportunity offered, he was sent back to Africa.

But, dear friends, in what a different state of mind did this poor man land in his own country to that in which he had left it. *Then* he was miserable and weighed down under a sense of his own sinfulness ; *now* he has found the Christian's God who paid the debt, and He believes that He bore his sins " in his own body on the tree." *Then* he was in darkness and ignorance, but *now*, enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit, he knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoices in His " great salvation."

May his experience be yours. May you as earnestly seek and as happily find Him to be

your Saviour, on whom was laid "the iniquity of us all;" and believing, may you "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter i. 8, 9.)

"ALL ye that pass by,
To Jesus draw nigh;
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
Your ransom and peace,
Your surety He is,
Come, see if there ever was sorrow like His.

"For what you have done
His blood must atone:
The Father hath punish'd for you His dear Son.
The Lord in the day
Of His anger did lay
Your sins on the Lamb: and He bore them away.

"He answer'd for all,
O come at His call,
And low at His cross with astonishment fall,
But lift up your eyes
At Jesus's cries:
Impassive He suffers, immortal He dies.

"He dies to atone
For sins not His own,
Your debt He hath paid, and your work He hath done,
Ye all may receive
The peace He did leave,
Who made intercession, 'My Father forgive.'

“ For you and for me
He pray’d on the tree,
The prayer is accepted, the sinner is free.
The sinner am I,
Who on Jesus rely,
And come for the pardon God cannot deny.

“ My pardon I claim,
For a sinner I am,
A sinner believing in Jesus’s name ;
He purchased the grace
Which now I embrace ;
O Father, Thou know’st He hath died in my place.

“ His death is my plea,
My ~~life~~ ^{sin} to see,
And hear the blood speak that hath answer’d for me.
Acquitted I was,
When He bled on the cross,
And by losing His life, He hath carried my cause.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHUNAMMITE MOTHER.

2 Kings iv. 8—37; viii. 1—6.

THE other story which we have given us in the life of Elisha the prophet, is about the Shunammite mother; you will find it also in the fourth chapter of the second book of Kings, and it begins thus, at the eighth verse: "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread." I suppose the word *great* here means rich—great in station and worldly substance. After this kind invitation, we find that the prophet, whenever he went to Shunem, turned in thither to eat bread.

This woman of Shunem had not only a large purse, but also a large heart, for she said to her husband: "Behold now, I perceive that this is

is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he will turn in thither."

The husband approved of his wife's plan, and a little chamber was made, and furnished with necessaries for the prophet's comfort and convenience, and the next time Elisha came that way, he took up his abode there, very thankful, no doubt, to his God for having thus provided him with a quiet resting-place. But although he saw the hand of God in the provision made for him, he did not forget her who had been used as the instrument, and he wished especially to thank her, and to show his gratitude to her by doing something in return for her kindness. "And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?"

Now this Shunammite had what very few, either amongst rich or poor, have the happiness to possess, namely, a contented spirit: "And she answered, I dwell among mine own people." Or in other words, "I am contented. God has been very good to me, I am surrounded with kind friends, and I desire nothing more than He has seen fit to give me."

Elisha, still desirous to give her some token of his gratitude, said to Gehazi, "What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old."

Without doubt, it was matter of great surprise to Gehazi, that the woman could be contented, seeing she had no children; this being considered amongst the Jewish people, as we have seen more than once before, a great misfortune to a wife. But could Elisha give children? No, certainly not; they are God's gift. But Gehazi believed that as his master was a great prophet, and had already done some wonderful miracles, that, in answer to his prayer, God would remove the curse of barrenness, and give a son to the Shunammite, and so it proved, for the woman was again called, and Elisha said

to her : " About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son."

This promise, so unexpected, was more than her faith was able at once to receive ; " And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." She did not wish to be deceived with a false hope, and she appeals to Elisha, as a " man of God," not to deceive her. Nor did he, for the promise was fulfilled, and she became, in due time, the happy mother of a son.

We may be sure that this good woman and her husband both rejoiced in the gift, as Abraham and Sarah had done at the birth of Isaac, and they were ready to say with the Psalmist : " Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul ; and forget not all his benefits." (Psalm ciii. 1, 2.) Some years after this, when the child was grown, he went out into the field, to his father, in the time of harvest, when the reapers were gathering in the corn, and was suddenly taken ill with a violent pain in his head, " And said unto his father, My head, my head." His father gave orders to a

lad to take him home to his mother. "And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died."

Thus was this good woman suddenly deprived by death of her only child. Now observe her conduct; she made no lamentation over him, she lost no time in that way, but she quietly carried her dead child up into the "little chamber," "and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again." Her husband, surprised at her haste, said: "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She does not appear to have told her husband the great sorrow that was in her heart, but she quietly answered: "It shall be well." No further opposition being made, as soon as the servant and ass were ready, she set out on her journey, "and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee."

"It was the ancient, as it is still the modern

custom in the East, when a female rides, for a servant to follow on foot, and to *drive*, as the expression is, and not *lead* the animal. Women usually ride on asses, and their attendants always on foot—drive or goad the animal forward at such a pace as the ladies may require.”—(*Bible Cyclopædia.*)

“So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel.” She cared not for the trouble or fatigue of the journey, if she could find the man of whom in her grief she sought help. When the prophet saw her coming at some distance, “He said to Gehazi, his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?” The sorrowing mother could not tell out her grief to the prophet’s servant, so she quietly replied to him as she had done to her husband, “It is well.”

But when she came to the prophet, his master, she threw herself at his feet; and when Gehazi would have “thrust her away,” the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and

hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?"

We are not told that she said more than this, but these few words show the anguish of her soul; and the prophet saw at once what was the matter. It was as if she had said: "I was contented to remain childless, I did not ask this gift. Why then was the child given me, if so soon to be taken away? Until he came, and I knew not the depth of a mother's love, I was satisfied and happy, but now, having tasted the sweetness of that love, my soul is in bitterness at the loss of my child. Why did God bestow the gift, if I might not keep it?"

Do you think, my friends, that the prophet could help her." He immediately opens a communication between himself and the dead child, for "He said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee; answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child."

But the mother is not satisfied with this, she

still clings to Elisha for help and comfort, and said to him: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." She cannot go home without the "man of God," for she felt that he, who had obtained the gift for her, was the only person, through whom that gift could be restored. She looked to him as the channel through which help from God must come. She had no faith in Gehazi, nor in the staff.

Elisha was quite willing to help, therefore "he arose, and followed her," as she requested. "And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked." No effect followed the laying of the staff upon the face of the child, for "when Elisha was come into the house, behold the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain," that is, himself and the dead child, "and prayed unto the Lord."

The prophet's faith must have been somewhat tried, for we find that his prayer was not imme-

diately answered. Why? we know not; but we are sure the Lord God of Israel had a wise purpose in the delay; Elisha, however, did not give up or despair of help. "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him, and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes."

Now the time was come for the mother to be called; she must have been waiting in anxious suspense all this time, not knowing what the result would be; yet confidently hoping and believing that the God of Israel would hear and answer their petitions.

Elisha said to Gehazi, "Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son." Her first act was, with adoring gratitude and thankfulness to God, to throw herself at the prophet's feet, and return thanks for the mercy shown to her. Now indeed, she could say: "It

is well." Then she "took up her son, and went out." From the conduct of this good woman we may learn some lessons.

There was an activity and energy about her, even in the midst of her sorrow, which is well worthy of our imitation. Instead of sitting down to bemoan her loss, in murmuring and despair, we find her carrying her case to the Lord's prophet—seeking his intercession, and not giving up until she had obtained what she desired and sought for.

Mark the earnestness of her words: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." She had faith which could realize that the Lord is the living God. Living, to do good to His people—living, to hear and help in time of trouble. She had confidence in the Lord's prophet too; so she clung to him because she believed that he had power, given him by God, to do what she needed. In all this she was not disappointed, as we have seen, for Elisha interceded and the Lord heard his prayers. But you may say, there is no great prophet now to whom we can go for such help as this, there is no one now upon earth to do such miracles as

these. True, there is none on earth ; but there is a Great Prophet in heaven, there is One at the right hand of God to intercede for us.

Yes, dear friends, Jesus our Great High Priest “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb. vii. 25.) All we need is the willing heart to come to Him—the faithful heart to believe in Him—the confiding heart to trust in Him—and the loving heart to do His will. If we have this—“*It shall be well.*” “*It is well.*” I want you now to observe the great difference there is in the manner in which these miracles of the prophets were done, and similar miracles performed by the Lord Jesus Christ when on earth.

We will read the account given us by St. Luke, of the raising to life of the ruler's little daughter. “And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue, and fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house : For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's

house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead ; trouble not the master. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not : believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her ; but he said, Weep not ; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway : and he commanded to give her some meat. And her parents were astonished : but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.”
★ (Luke viii. 41, 42, 49—56.) You will observe that as soon as the Lord Jesus took the child by the hand, and said unto her, “Maid, arise,” “her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.”

It was the same with the widow's son, at Nain, Jesus said : “Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.” (Luke vii. 14, 15.) And

again at the grave of Lazarus, who had been dead four days. Jesus "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth." (John xi. 43, 44.) Why was this difference? Because a greater than Elisha was here! In all these miracles, and in others recorded in the gospels, we see the power and God-head of the man Christ Jesus. Yes, dear friends, "God was manifest in the flesh." And it is this Almighty Saviour, who is exalted at God's right hand to intercede for you, He is there to answer any charge against all those who believe in Him. For Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. ix. 24.)

Some years after the events I have related to you in the life of the Shunammite mother, when, as it appears, she had become a widow, Elisha warned her that the Lord was going to send a famine upon the land, for seven years; so he advised her to leave her home and go and live where she could find bread for herself and her household. She did as the man of God told her, and went and dwelt in the land of the Philistines.

When the famine was over, at the end of seven years, she came back again to her own country, to Shunem, and then, finding that during her absence her property had been taken for the king's use, "She went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land."

Gehazi, the prophet's servant, was now of service to her. The king had asked Gehazi to tell him all the great things that Elisha had done. "And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now." Here again we see how much this Shunammite was indebted to Elisha ! Yes, it was indeed a great debt of gratitude she owed him.

And as she looked back on all the years of her past life, since she had proposed to her husband to make "the little chamber on the wall," for the prophet's comfort, she would feel how abundantly she had been rewarded for that act of kindness : first, by the gift of her child, then his restoration to life, after that short but fatal sickness ; again, their preservation during the seven years of famine, and now the recovery of all their property.

My dear friends, no act of kindness, however small, which is done to the Lord's people from love to Him is ever lost or forgotten. Jesus says of each such act, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. (Matt. xxv. 40 ; x, 42.) What encouragement this is to any of us, even the poorest, to do what we can to comfort and help a poor, sick, or distressed neighbour ! May God give us grace ever to follow the example of the Shunammite mother.

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" GRACIOUS Lord, incline Thine ear,
My requests vouchsafe to hear ;
Hear my never-ceasing cry—
Give me Christ, or else I die.

" Lord deny me what Thou wilt,
Only ease me of my guilt ;
Suppliant at Thy feet I lie—
Give me Christ, or else I die.

" All unholy and unclean,
I am nothing else but sin ;
On Thy mercy I rely—
Give me Christ, or else I die.

" Thou dost freely save the lost,
In Thy grace alone I trust ;
With my earnest suit comply—
Give me Christ, or else I die.

" Thou dost promise to forgive
All who in Thy Son believe ;
Lord, I know Thou canst not lie—
Give me Christ, or else I die.

" Father, does Thy justice frown ?
Let me shelter in Thy Son !
Jesus, to Thy arms I fly—
Come and save me, or I die."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOTHER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Luke i. 5—25, 57—80.

WE finished last time our readings about the mothers in the Old Testament, and will therefore now take the first mother mentioned in the New Testament, and this is Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, whose short history, with that of her husband, you will find in the first chapter of St. Luke's gospel. We will begin at the fifth verse.

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” I wish you to observe the character given us here of Zacharias

and Elisabeth. It is a blessed character indeed ! And, as it is not what they said of themselves, nor what their neighbours said ; but what God said of them, we are sure that it is true. “ For the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (1 Sam. xvi. 7.)

“ They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Are we to gather from this, that they were not born in sin ? or that they never had sinned ? Certainly not. This would be to contradict other parts of God’s word, which tell us : “ There is none righteous, no, not one,” “ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. iii. 10, 23.) Therefore, when it is said : “ They were both righteous before God,” I suppose it means that they were sincere in the service of God ; that they followed the example of Noah, of whom God says in the book of Genesis : “ Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” But, how was it that Noah was righteous ? truly, it was by the grace of God, for we are told : “ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the

Lord. . . . Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." (Gen. vi. 8, 9 ; vii. 1.)

If we, dear friends, "walked with God," as Noah did, or like Zacharias and Elisabeth, walked "in all the commandments and ordinances of God," we should indeed lead far more perfect lives than we now do. We should then "have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts xxiv. 16.) And how much happier we should be. But, alas ! we fall far short of that perfection required of us in God's word ! And why ? because, naturally, we love sin and hate holiness. It is not until by God's grace and mercy in Christ Jesus, our hearts are changed, that we can, in any measure, do the will of God. Another thing we are told of Zacharias and Elisabeth is, that "they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years." Which means that they were both very old. Zacharias was a priest, and his office in turn with the other priests, was to burn incense morning and evening, in the temple of the Lord, whilst the people were praying outside.

The altar of incense was made of shittim wood, and overlaid with pure gold. It was placed in that part of the temple called the sanctuary, or holy place. And these are the directions which the Lord gave to Moses, about the burning of the incense in the golden censor, upon the golden altar: "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations." (Exodus xxx. 7, 8.) This offering of daily incense by the priest, was, as we see from the book of Revelation, a type of the daily prayers of the Lord's people, and of the continual intercession of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. For we read in the fifth chapter, of golden vials full of odours or incense, "which are the prayers of the saints." And in the eighth chapter it is said, "And another angel came, and stood at the altar, having a golden censor, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was

before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." And this is just what we find Zacharias doing, he is standing in the holy place, offering the incense upon the golden altar, and the multitude of the people are praying in the court without. David refers to this custom, when he says, "Let my prayer be set before thee as incense." (Psalm cxli. 1.) It was whilst Zacharias was thus burning incense in the holy place, that "there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." The angel then went on to give further particulars concerning this remarkable child, all of which were fulfilled in John the Baptist. "And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years."

How like was this question of Zacharias, to

that of Abraham and Sarah, as we saw in the book of Genesis, Abraham said, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah that is ninety years old, bear?" "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my Lord, being old also?" (Gen. xvii. 17; xviii. 12.)

How slow is man to believe God's word, and how ready to say, "Whereby shall I know this?" A heavy punishment fell upon Zacharias for his unbelief, as you will see. "And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

All this time the people were waiting outside for Zacharias, and they wondered why he was so long in the temple; but when he did come out, and could not speak to them, "they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he

beckoned unto them and remained speechless." As soon as the time came for another priest to take Zacharias' place, "he departed to his own house."

What a trial it must have been to him not to be able to speak to his wife, and to tell her all that had happened! But was he to be always dumb? Oh no! only until all the things that the angel had promised should be performed—only until his child was born!

"And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men." What a great change had a few months wrought in the feelings and circumstances of Elisabeth! When they were younger she and her husband had wished and prayed for a son; but they had long ceased to expect an answer to their prayers. Those prayers, however, had not been unheard, nor were they forgotten, for you will remember, the angel said to Zacharias, "Fear not, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son." Yes, Zacharias; it seems

long to you since you offered that prayer, but your God has not forgotten it. He heard it, and days and years are nothing to Him; for "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Peter iii. 8.)

Zacharias, as I have said, had long ceased to ask for or to expect an answer to his prayer, and that is why, when the answer was promised him, he was so much taken by surprise, that he could not believe it.

About six months after the appearance of the angel to Zacharias, his wife Elisabeth had a visit from her young cousin Mary, afterwards the mother of Jesus; this meeting was a cause of much joy to both women, for Elisabeth, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, recognised in Mary the mother of the promised Messiah, and said to her, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." Mary staid with Elisabeth three months, and then "returned to her own house."

We come now to the entire fulfilment of the angel's promise: "Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered, and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and

her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her."

And this is what the angel had said should come to pass. "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth." These friends of Elisabeth did right to rejoice with her, in her joy, by so doing they pleased God, who has given us this command, by the Apostle Paul: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." (Rom. xii. 15.)

When Elisabeth's child was a week old, that is, "on the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all."

It was in obedience to the angel's command that Zacharias and Elisabeth named their child

John, which means grace or favour, to the great surprise of all present, for it appears to have been the custom then, as it is now, to name children after their parents or relations. When Zacharias had performed this act of obedience, "his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God." Do you not see what a blessed use Zacharias made of the gift of speech, thus restored to him?

Well would it be for us all, dear friends, if we remembered, constantly, for what purpose our tongues are given, but it is to be feared, that we too frequently put them to an evil use, instead of using them to the praise of God. And why is this? Because our hearts are so full of evil, as our Lord says in the gospel. "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by

thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt. xii. 34—37.) How important then for us daily, yes, and hourly too, to use these prayers of the Psalmist: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." (Psalm cxli. 3; li. 15.)

How great must Elisabeth's joy have been to hear again the sound of her husband's voice, and especially to hear him speaking forth the praises of the God of Israel.

I know a dear Christian lady at the present time who, from sore disease, has not been able to speak for many months to her loving and anxious relatives, and it is not likely that she will ever be able to speak to them again on earth; but in heaven her tongue will be loosed, and then she will join the song of the redeemed in glory, saying: "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." (Rev. vii. 12.)

Now let us return to the house of Zacharias. The wonderful things which had taken place

there, and the miraculous birth of Elisabeth's child, were a cause of fear and amazement to all their neighbours, for it is said : " And fear came on all that dwelt round about them ; and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be ? " Well might they ask such a question as this, when they thought about and talked over all that had happened ! And now that Zacharias' speech was restored, he was able to tell them all that the angel had said to him about the future of his child. We will look, and see what it was. " For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink ; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias (or Elijah) to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. " Added to this, we are told : " And

the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying . . . And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God: whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

What a great and happy privilege did Elisabeth enjoy, in being the mother of such a child as this—a child filled with the Holy Ghost from his birth—a child of whom such high and holy things were predicted—a child who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world!

Our story, of the birth and infancy of John the Baptist, closes with these words: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

We know nothing further of the life of

The altar of incense was made of shittim wood, and overlaid with pure gold. It was placed in that part of the temple called the sanctuary, or holy place. And these are the directions which the Lord gave to Moses, about the burning of the incense in the golden censor, upon the golden altar: "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations." (Exodus xxx. 7, 8.) This offering of daily incense by the priest, was, as we see from the book of Revelation, a type of the daily prayers of the Lord's people, and of the continual intercession of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. For we read in the fifth chapter, of golden vials full of odours or incense, "which are the prayers of the saints." And in the eighth chapter it is said, "And another angel came, and stood at the altar, having a golden censor, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was

declared, to prepare the way of the Lord. And St. John tells us, in the first chapter of his gospel, how the Baptist directed those who followed him to Christ, saying, "I baptise with water: but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. . . . The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me." (John i. 26—30.)

After this, we are told by St. Matthew the sad story of John's imprisonment and death. "For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised

with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus." (Matt. xiv. 3—12.)

We have here a sad story of sin, injustice, and cruelty! An innocent man is imprisoned, because in the discharge of his duty, as a prophet or public teacher, sent by God, he reproves the king for his adultery with his brother's wife. Afterwards, to gratify the revenge of the wicked queen, he is beheaded by a soldier in his prison. Do you not think, my friends, that it was a very sad thing for this young princess that she had such a bad mother, one who taught her so early to be cruel and unjust? Her high station, with such parents, could not make her happy: she would have

been far better off in the meanest cottage with a poor, but God-fearing mother, although denied the grandeur and luxury of the court, because then she would have been trained in godliness and virtue. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." (Prov. xii. 4; xxxi. 10, 30.)

HASTEN, sinner, to be wise,
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Wisdom, if you still despise,
Harder is she to be won.

Hasten, sinner, to return;
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Lest thy lamp should cease to burn
Ere the needful work be done.

Hasten, mercy to implore,
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Lest thy season should be o'er,
Ere to-morrow is begun.

Lord, do Thou the sinner turn;
Rouse him from his senseless state;
Let him not Thy counsel spurn,
And lament his choice too late.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLESSED MOTHER.

St. Luke i., ii. St. Matthew i., ii.

TO-DAY, dear friends, we are to study the history of that mother, who was said by an angel of the Lord to be "blessed among women." All that we know *truly* of her history is to be found in the gospels.

We will look first at St. Luke, first chapter, beginning at the 26th verse : " And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David ; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee : blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him,

she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not Mary : for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest : and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David : and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man ? And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age : and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." What a striking difference there was between Elisabeth and Mary ! Elisabeth was old, and had been many years married to Zacharias ; but had had no

children ; Mary was a young woman, and at present unmarried. Well might the angel say, " With God nothing shall be impossible." This assurance was enough for Mary : she at once received and believed the angel's message to be sent by God : " And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

St. Matthew gives us the result of the angel's visit, and introduces us more particularly to Joseph, who is generally thought to have been much older than Mary. " Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife : for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a

son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. . . . Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son, and he called his name Jesus."

The next event in Mary's life seems to have been her visit to her cousin Elisabeth, as related by St. Luke: "And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth." And it was after the salutation of Elisabeth that Mary spoke her well-known song of praise, called in our Prayer-book the "Magnificat." "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His hand-maiden: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him, from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with His arm, He hath

scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

In this song, which in some points, is very much like Hannah's song, Mary praises the Lord for the great and exalted privilege, she, a poor woman, enjoyed in being chosen to be the mother of the man Christ Jesus; while at the same time she acknowledges herself a sinner, for you will remember she says: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Saviour*."

Mary had been told by the angel to call her son Jesus, which name means Saviour, and was thus explained to Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Mary believed that her child would prove to be that Saviour, so long promised to the world—that Messiah the Jews had so long expected; therefore she goes on to say: "from

henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name." The angel had said to her, and Elisabeth had repeated it, "Blessed art thou among women."

Let us observe here that these words give no encouragement to exalt Mary above women, as the Church of Rome does; for it is not said, "Blessed art thou *above* women," but "*among* women." We may speak of the Virgin Mary as "blessed," we may regard her as one "highly favoured" of the Lord, for indeed she was; but we must not pray to her, nor ask her to pray for us. We must not give to her that honour which belongs to God alone. To do these things is idolatry; because Mary was only a poor sinful woman like ourselves. By grace alone she was saved, through faith in God her Saviour, and not for any merit or good works of her own. And in her song of praise she gives all the glory to God, and assumes nothing to herself. And we cannot, my dear friends, do better than follow her good example.

It was after Mary's return from this visit to her cousin, at Hebron, that Joseph took her to

be his wife, as related by St. Matthew. Just about this time St. Luke tells us an order was given forth by the Roman Emperor, that every part of his empire should pay taxes to him. The Jews, being under the government of the emperor, were obliged to obey this command, "And all went to be taxed, every one to his own city." As Joseph and Mary were descended from David, they were obliged to go to Bethlehem, that being the town to which their family belonged, and it was during their stay at this place, that Mary "brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." An eastern stable was but a poor lodging for her at such a time, but the town was so full of people who had come there as Joseph and Mary had done "to be taxed," that they could not obtain a better lodging, especially as they were poor people, and could not afford to pay much money for it. Although Jesus was born in such obscurity, yet his birth was made known by angels to some Jewish shepherds. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field,

keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them : and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ' For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you ; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

What a wonderful sight was this, which these Bethlehem shepherds beheld ! How astonished they must have been to see all at once in the night " the glory of the Lord ;" well might they be " sore afraid." But soon the gracious words " fear not " set their hearts at rest, and they could listen with wonder and joy to the blessed announcement made by the angel, that to them was born " a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Then follows the song of the many angels,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace:” because Jesus, the “Prince of Peace,” Jesus “our Peace,” was born, and “Good will toward men.” “And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” What were Mary’s feelings all this time? This is all that is said about her. “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”

In this, no doubt, Mary did wisely; and here again, we should do well to follow her example, by quietly meditating upon God’s word, and watching the leadings of Divine Providence; as David says in the last verse of the 107th Psalm: “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness

of the Lord." But women too generally take an opposite course, they run to tell their neighbours every bit of news they can pick up. In this way much valuable time is lost, which might be so much better employed in attending to their home duties ; or like Mary in pondering, that is, thinking about or meditating upon God's Holy Word, and His dealings with them and their families, in providence and grace. It is well to think much, and talk little. There is truth in the old proverb, "A still tongue makes a wise head."

The next thing in our history of Mary is the circumcision of the child, when He was eight days old, according to the law, and His name was called Jesus, which was the name given Him by the angel before His birth. About a month after the circumcision, Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." In the temple they saw a very old man named Simeon, to whom it had been revealed, "by the Holy Ghost," that he should not die until "he

had seen the Lord's Christ." Simeon took Jesus "up in his arms and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." "And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Simeon blessed them and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

An aged widow named Anna also came into the temple, and she "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." All this must have supplied Mary with much matter for thoughtful meditation; for she saw, in the babe she was privileged to carry in her arms, One who was far beyond herself in greatness, power, and glory. Well might she and her

husband marvel "at those things which were spoken of Him."

I have told you how the birth of Jesus was made known to the Jews, namely, by an angel appearing to some shepherds, who were keeping watch over their flocks by night; but this was not enough, for Jesus came to be "a Light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel." St. Matthew tells us how the blessed news of His birth was made known to the Gentiles, and says: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

When Herod heard what the wise men said, he was greatly alarmed, and began to make inquiries of the learned men amongst the Jews, about the birth of the expected Christ, and they told him that according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Christ must be born at Bethlehem. Then Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find the young child, and he told

them when they had found Him to come back to Jerusalem and tell him, pretending that he also wished to come and worship Him.

The wise men, guided by the same star they had seen in the East, found their way to Bethlehem, for we are told it "went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." The wise men did not go back to Jerusalem, as Herod had told them to do, but "being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother

by night, and departed into Egypt." It must have been trying to Mary to be obliged thus hastily, and by night, to take a long journey with her infant into a strange country, instead of going, as she and her husband had intended, back to their home at Nazareth ; but they were acting under God's direction in the matter, and therefore they were cared for and happy. It was very soon made evident that they had done right in leaving Bethlehem, for when Herod found that the wise men did not return to tell him where they had found Jesus, he "was exceeding wrath, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men." This act of cruelty was, as St. Matthew tells us, a fulfilment of a prophecy by Jeremiah : "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted, because they are not." (See Jeremiah xxxi. 15.)

We learn from history that this barbarously cruel king died soon after of a very painful

disease; and thus the judgment of God was visited upon him. After his death, "behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life." Joseph, in obedience to this command, immediately returned with Mary and the infant Jesus to the land of Israel; but fearing Archelaus, the cruel son of Herod, who reigned in Judea, he did not go to Bethlehem again, but went direct to their own city Nazareth in Galilee. And as St. Luke tells us: "the child grew, and waxed strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."

I have now, dear friends, given you all the incidents recorded of Mary's life during the infancy of the Holy Child Jesus; there are a few others which belong to a later period, these I must reserve for another time. In all that we have read, I think, you must have observed, that it is not the life of Mary which is given us in the gospels, but that of the Lord Jesus. Mary is in no case brought prominently forward;

that she was a good and holy woman there can be no doubt, or she would not have been chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus; but you must remember, she was the mother of Jesus in His human nature only, not as the Roman Catholics falsely say, "Mother of God;" this could not be, for as God, Jesus existed from all eternity. He is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." (1 Tim. i. 17; vi. 15, 16.)

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah ix. 6.)

HARK ! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King ;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled ;"
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies ;
With the angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem !"

Hallelujah !

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord ;
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb !
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity !
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel.

Hallelujah !

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace !
Hail the Sun of Righteousness !
Light and life to all He brings ;
Risen with healing in His wings ;
Mild, He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die ;
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLESSED MOTHER.

Luke ii. 41—52; John ii. 1—12; Matt. xii. 45—50;
John xix 25—27.

You will remember, dear friends, that we left off in Mary's history where she and her husband returned to Nazareth with the holy child Jesus, after their stay in Egypt. And it is evident, that they now settled down in their own quiet home, and that Joseph continued to work at his business as a carpenter, for we find it is said of Jesus, by the Jews some years after, when He had been teaching in their synagogue: "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? (Matt. xiii. 55, 56.) We learn also, as you see from this passage, that Mary

had four other sons and some daughters ; but we have no account of the family history, except that " they went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." But when Jesus was twelve years old, St. Luke gives us some interesting particulars connected with their journey to Jerusalem. Let us read from the 42nd verse of the 2nd chapter : " And when he was twelve years old they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey ; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him they were amazed : and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? behold thy

father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

What great anxiety Mary must have felt during the three days that her child was missing! Yet mark how quietly she speaks to Him: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." She could not quite understand how it was that her Son, who had, up to this time, been so good and obedient to her, should all at once appear to cast off her authority, and cause her and her husband so much uneasiness. But the only answer to her tender inquiry was, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye (or do not you know) that I must be about my Father's business?" Mary and Joseph did not understand what Jesus meant by this reply, but they said no more to Him, for He went home with them and "was subject (or obedient) unto them"

as before. Mary, however, did not forget, but "kept all these sayings in her heart," and she found abundant food for thoughtful meditation.

Jesus, her Son, had said, He must be about His Father's business. Did He mean by this that God was His Father? and had He a work given Him to do, in which she could take no share? Yes; evidently, He wished her to understand this, and that no affection or regard for her must be allowed to interfere with that work. Speaking of this work afterwards, the Lord Jesus says: "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." (John ix. 4.) And again, when near the close of His life on earth, He said to His Father in heaven: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John xvii. 4.) This work, you know dear friends, was the salvation of lost sinners. His name was called Jesus, that is, the Saviour, because, as you will recollect, He came to "save his people from their sins."

In the prophecy of Isaiah the Lord Jesus, speaking of His work says: "And I looked

and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me." (Isaiah lxiii. 5.) In this work of salvation none *could* help, as St. Peter says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts iv. 12.)

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts x. 43.)

"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts v. 31.)

As I told you before, we have not the history of Mary's life given us, therefore we must again pass over many years until we come to the time when Jesus began His public ministry, at thirty years of age.

In the second chapter of St. John's Gospel, we read an account of Christ's first miracle. It was at a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, Mary was present, and Jesus also, with his disciples. The persons married are supposed to have been related to Mary, which accounts for

her knowing that there was not sufficient wine for the guests; for it is said, "And when they wanted wine the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine."

Mary appears certainly to have expected that her Son had power to supply wine by a miracle. She had not forgotten what the angel had said unto her. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, * * * * therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And she would have Him now in this time of need, put forth His power and Godhead. But again, the Lord Jesus wished her to understand that although as man He was her son, and had submitted to her maternal authority; yet, as God, He could not be interfered with; therefore, He said unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

A striking lesson this is, for those who pray to Mary, and ask her to intercede for them with Jesus. But Mary knows better now! And we may be sure, that in heaven, where she sees Jesus "as He is," sitting in glory, at the right hand of God, she will not attempt to interfere

with His work as Mediator. She knows that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. ii. 5.) She knows that if she had no power with Jesus when He was on earth, she can have none in heaven: and that if she did presume to interfere with His work now, she would get the same answer, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

Although Mary found that Jesus would not permit her to use her authority with Him, yet she still hoped that He might do something to supply the need of her friends; so she said to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

I do not want you to think that Mary was wrong in coming to Jesus for help, this she could not be, and we may safely follow her example, and go straight to Jesus as she did, not as the Romanists teach, *through* Mary, as if she were more kind and merciful than Jesus, who died to save us, and who says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." (John vi. 37.) "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my

name, I will do it." (John xiv. 13, 14.)
"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (John xvi. 23, 24.) What encouragement these verses give us to go directly in prayer to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, that we may obtain all that we need, both for our souls and our bodies. Mary, as I told you, directed the servants to look to Jesus for a supply of wine, and He did not disappoint them, as you will see.

"And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins a piece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every

man at the beginning doth set forth good wine ; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse : but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him. After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples : and they continued there not many days."

This miracle manifested forth the glory of Jesus, because it showed to all present that He was God as well as man, for as I have said before, it is God alone that can create, or make things out of nothing :—

" Know that the Lord is God alone,
He can create, and He destroy."

Jesus lived, generally, at Capernaum during the time of His public ministry ; but He appears to have had no fixed home at this period, for He said on one occasion, " Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." (Luke ix. 58.) And we are also told : " And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and

preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people." (Matt. iv. 23.) Whether Mary continued to live at the old home at Nazareth all this time we cannot tell, for after the marriage at Cana we hear nothing about her, except that one Sabbath day, when Jesus was teaching the people, "one said unto Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. xii. 46—50.) From this reply of Jesus, we see how very near to Him, He regards those who believe in Him, and do the will of God; for He passes by all the claims of natural relationship, and speaks only of that tie which binds Him to his disciples. As He saith in another place: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John xv. 14.)

We must now pass on to the end of the Lord

Jesus' life on earth; and in the nineteenth chapter of St. John's gospel, which gives an account of His condemnation and crucifixion, we find this mention of Mary: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." What a sorrowful time was this to Mary; now indeed was fulfilled the prophecy of the aged Simeon in the temple: "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also;" for it must have been a terrible shock to her mother's heart, to see her beloved Son thus suffering a cruel and disgraceful death upon the cross. And she might well ask, as many doubtless did, Is this the end of all His greatness? for it is probable that Mary shared in the idea, common among His disciples, and which we find expressed to Jesus Himself soon after His resurrection, by two of them on their way to Emmaus: "And they said unto Him,

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people : And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke xxiv. 19—21.)

The redemption which they had looked for was a national one. The Jews expected a Messiah who should deliver them from the power of the Romans, and make their nation free and great as it had been in the days of David and Solomon. How great then was the disappointment to His disciples, when they saw Jesus, who they believed was this Messiah, condemned and put to death by those very Romans. Mary, faithful to her Son to the last, stood at the foot of His cross ; she did not fear those cruel soldiers who pierced and nailed Him to the tree ; but there she waited and watched until Jesus, in all tenderness and filial love, committed her to the care of His beloved disciple John, saying to her, " Woman, behold thy Son ! " and to John, " Behold thy mother ! And from that hour, that disciple took her unto his own home."

Mary now passes into retirement, and is only mentioned again in connection with Mary Magdalene, and other faithful women at the sepulchre of Jesus, on the morning of His resurrection.

“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came into the sepulchre, bringing the spices, which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother

of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.” (Luke xxiv. 1—10.)

The sorrow of Mary and of the other women must now have been turned into wonder and joy, as they listened to the words of the angels, and remembered what Jesus had said to them about His death and resurrection. What happiness to see again Him whom they so much loved; but it was only for a little while, because about six weeks after the Lord Jesus ascended up to heaven, as related by St. Luke at the close of his gospel, and also in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. “And he led them out (that is the eleven apostles) as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.” (Luke xxiv. 50—53.) “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked

stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts i. 9—11.)

After the ascension of their Lord, and the reception of this gracious promise of His second coming, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, and there we find them assembled in an upper room, and Mary with them. This is the only time her name is mentioned in the New Testament, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." (Acts i. 14.)

We must now, dear friends, close our history of Mary, which, as it is so closely connected with that of the Lord Jesus, has been extremely interesting. We must learn, I think, from all that we have read in the gospels on this subject, that Mary is comparatively nothing; but that Jesus is everything. We see Mary throughout

“the handmaid of the Lord ;” but Jesus “God over all, blessed for evermore.” And while we will pity and pray for our poor deceived and benighted Roman Catholic neighbours, we will not follow their example in giving that honour to a woman which belongs to God alone, but will remember “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. ii. 9—11.) “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins : Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers : all things were created by him, and for him ; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” (Col. i. 14—17.)

Jesus who lived above the sky,
Came down to be a man and die ;
And in the Bible we may see
How very good He used to be.

He went about, He was so kind,
To cure poor people who were blind :
And many who were sick and lame,
He pitied them and did the same.

And more than that He told them too
The things that God would have them do ;
And was so gentle and so mild,
He would have listen'd to a child.

But such a cruel death He died,
He was hung up and crucified :
And those kind hands that did such good,
They nail'd them to a cross of wood.

And so He died !—and this is why
He came to be a man and die ;
The Bible says, He came from heaven,
That we might have our sins forgiven.

He knew how wicked men had been,
And knew that God must punish sin ;
So, out of pity, Jesus said
He'd bear the punishment instead.

Now God will pardon those who pray,
And strive from sin to turn away ;
O may we early seek His face,
And share the riches of His grace.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

WE finished last time, our history of the principal mothers mentioned in the Bible; it now remains for us to make a few concluding remarks.

You will recollect that we began with the first mother, Eve. We saw how she and her husband, by their disobedience to the command of God, introduced sin and misery into the world; and we ended with an account of "Mary the mother of Jesus"—the man Christ Jesus, who by His life of holiness on earth, and His atoning sacrifice on the cross for us, "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. i. 10.) "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.)

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rom. v. 19.)

We lost everything by the sin of Adam and Eve; we get back everything through Jesus Christ. Let us not imagine, dear friends, that if we had been in Eve's place we should never have done as she did. Placed in the same circumstances, and under the influence of the same temptation, there is no doubt but any one of us would have fallen as she did.

Perhaps you have never heard the old story of a poor man, who, when digging in a garden one hot day, was heard by the master to call out frequently, as he wiped the sweat from his face, "O Adam! Adam!" The gentleman, after a while, inquired why he so continually called upon Adam. The poor man replied, "O if Adam had not been so foolish as to eat the forbidden fruit, I should never have had to labour so hard this hot day!" The master said, "Then, I suppose, if you had been in Adam's place, you would not have disobeyed God, and eaten of the forbidden fruit." "Oh no!" said the man, "that I am sure I

would not, for Adam had plenty without it, he did not want to have eaten it." The gentleman said no more then; but at the dinner hour he invited the poor gardener in to a plentiful meal. There were several dishes on the table, of which he was told he might eat; but there was one covered dish in the middle, which he must on no account meddle with or even uncover. The poor man said to himself, "If I may always have such a supply as this, I do not care for what is covered up in that dish." And being hungry, he began at once to eat his dinner, but as soon as he had satisfied himself with the good food on the table, he began to wonder what was in the covered dish. He did not want to eat any more, though if it were something nice, he should like just to taste it. At all events, there could be no harm in just lifting up the cover a little way to look, nobody would know it. So he raised the cover a little way, and to his great surprise, out ran a mouse. In his fright and eagerness to catch it, he put down the cover with so much noise, and made such a clatter with the dishes, that the gentleman heard him, and suspecting what was the matter,

went to see. He then told the poor man, that he must never again find fault with Adam; because this was a proof that he could not resist temptation any better than Adam did.

Yes, dear friends, it has ever been so throughout the history of mankind. All has been failure as far as man was concerned. Nature cannot stand alone. If ever you attempt any right thing in your own strength, you must fail, because your strength is utter weakness.

You may make resolutions to give up this or that sin, this or that evil habit; but if you do not seek the help of Divine Grace by earnest, constant, fervent prayer, you will soon grow tired, and the sin or evil habit will gain the mastery over you again, perhaps stronger than ever. Jesus says: "Without me ye can do nothing." (John xv. 15.)

I was reading the other day of a case which illustrates this. A poor woman, about sixty years old, lived in an almshouse, where she might have enjoyed much peace and comfort, but that she was unfortunately in the habit of taking opium. Many times she had been warned, and many times she had resolved to

leave it off, and had even given up the fatal bottle to the kind lady who visited her, but as often bought herself a fresh one. At last, after a severe attack of *delirium tremens*, she once more begged the lady to take away her bottle, promising that she would never again take a drop of laudanum. In order to put her sincerity to the test, she was advised to give up her home in the almshouse, and to go into the workhouse, where she would no longer, by the rules of the house, be allowed to have any. This she consented to do, but after the excitement of the removal was over, she sank into such a state of melancholy, that it was feared she would soon lose her reason and commit suicide. She begged and entreated to have her bottle returned, but this was not permitted. Meanwhile the lady prayed with her, and read the Bible to her, and endeavoured to point her to Jesus, whose blood "cleanseth from all sin." She became more calm and quiet, but was still without peace. Some months after, on her friend's return home, after an absence of a few weeks, the poor woman told her that everything was changed; that her prayers now seemed full of light, that

the Bible was a new book to her ; and that she could constantly hear those words sounding in her ears, " The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Afterwards, with a little help, she learnt to read, that she might be able to study the Bible for herself ; and she was made useful to many of her companions in the workhouse, where she lived for several years, and at last died in peace.

Besides Eve and Mary, we have studied the histories of ten other Bible mothers. Some of them have been the wives of rich men, as Sarah the wife of Abraham ; Rebekah, the wife of Isaac ; Hannah, the wife of Elkanah ; and the Shunammite ; others have been poor : as Hagar, Sarah's bondmaid ; Jochebed, the wife of Amram, a poor slave in Egypt ; and the widow Naomi with Ruth her daughter-in-law ; the widow of Zarephath, and the poor widow left in debt by her husband. But whether rich or poor, I think we found that all had their trials and temptations. Those who were rich did not find happiness in their riches, and those who were poor were not necessarily unhappy because they were poor. I know that the temptations and trials of

poverty are very great, but I am sure of this, that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x. 13.)

But then you must obey the word of God. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." (James iv. 7, 8.)

If you give way to temptation—if you go on wandering from God—if you live in constant rebellion against your Father in heaven—if you give yourselves up to do the works and follow the ways of the devil, you must not wonder that you are miserably poor and unhappy.

The devil never yet made any one happy; but he has made thousands upon thousands poor and wretched. The devil is man's great adversary or enemy, therefore God says to us: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist stedfast in the faith." (1 Peter v. 8, 9.)

If you knew that a lion, a tiger, or some other wild beast was prowling about the streets, or even loose some where in the neighbourhood, how afraid you would be to come out of your houses; how carefully close you would keep your children; how you would beg of your husbands to keep out of its way. But, dear friends, the devil is fiercer than the lion, more cruel and bloodthirsty than the tiger or any other wild beast; and moreover, he is every day destroying men, women, and children, both body and soul; and yet you almost forget that he exists. You see your husbands going on in drunkenness, swearing, and sabbath-breaking—your children growing up in the practice of the same evil ways; and yet, for the most part, you are not concerned; you do not see that it is the devil destroying them; and you do not offer up one single prayer to God for their deliverance. Nay; I fear that too many of you, wives and mothers, are yourselves walking in the same evil course—in the same broad road that leadeth to destruction.

You suffer want and misery from the waste of your husbands and yet how many of you follow

their evil example ; for where we see one wife industrious, cleanly, and God-fearing, we find ten that are careless, dirty, idle, and ungodly. And many a man is driven to spend his evenings in the public house, by the idleness and illtemper of his wife. If you be ever so poor, you may make the use of the little you have, by careful industry—you may be cheerful and contented—you may give to your husbands a loving welcome when they come home at the end of the day's work. "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." (1 Tim. vi. 6—11.)

Strive to follow the example of the pious mothers we have been reading about in the Bible. Endeavour as they did, to train up your children in the right way ; you will have your reward. Teach them God's Holy Word as the Jewish parents did, according to the commandment given them by Moses : "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in

thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. vi. 6, 7.)

Eunice the mother of Timothy is a blessed example in this respect, she diligently taught her son, even when very young, out of the scriptures, for St. Paul, writing to Timothy, says: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15.)

What was the effect of this teaching? It made Timothy, when called to the work, an able minister of the gospel. And we find how confidently St. Paul speaks, not only of Timothy's faith, but also of the faith of his mother and grandmother, those honoured women, who had taught him the Word of God in his youth, for he says: "When I call to remembrance the

unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice ; and I am persuaded that in thee also." (2 Tim. i. 5.) Eunice had God's word in her heart—she believed, she trusted, she loved that word ; and therefore she felt it her first duty, her highest privilege, her chief pleasure, to teach it to her child. Yes, my friends, this was the grand secret, this was why she did it, and this is the reason she succeeded so well. Will you not follow her example ?

Perhaps you say, I have no time, I am too busy. No, no, my friends, you must not excuse yourselves in this way, for if you love God's word you will be able to find a few minutes every day, both for reading it, and for prayer with your children. And whilst at your work, you may teach them a verse of scripture, and talk to them about it. Do not be satisfied merely to send them to school when they are old enough, for others to teach them. Do not deprive yourselves of the blessed privilege of first teaching them, by your own good example, what is right, as well as storing their minds with God's truth. They will learn evil fast enough,

you may be sure of that, so you must try to give them that which will be the best cure for the evil. "Fill the sack with corn, and there will be no room for chaff." Store your children's minds and memories with good things, and there will not be room for the bad things, which wicked men and the devil will be ever ready to put into them. Let your children see that you keep the Lord's day holy; "not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words." (Isaiah lviii. 13.) Take them to God's house as soon as they are old enough, and teach them to be quiet and attentive whilst there. Let them see that you take an interest in the services, and love to listen to God's holy word, whether it be read or explained. Above all, pray for your children, and pray with them; and you may be assured that God will bless and teach you, whilst you are trying to teach them.

Dear friends, we may learn many a lesson of simple faith and trust from little children, for they know nothing of the doubts and unbelief of those of riper years. It was a little child that the Lord Jesus called unto Him when He

would teach His disciples how they must be prepared for the kingdom of heaven. "And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii. 2—4.)

Give a promise of something to your child, tell him he must wait until to-morrow, and then you will give it; the child will believe your word, and will wait the appointed time, but on the morrow he will expect you to keep your promise, unless you have, by your want of faithfulness, already taught him to doubt your word. Sad indeed is it for children when they have learned to doubt their mother! As your little child trusts you, so do you trust your Heavenly Father.

"Why art thou full of anxious fear
How thou shalt be sustained and fed?
He who hath made and placed thee here
Will give thee needful daily bread."

Let the following hymn be the prayer of your heart, and the language of your lips—

“Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,
Make me teachable and mild,
Humble, upright, free from art ;
Make me as a little child,
From distrust and envy free,
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.

What Thou shalt to-day provide
Let me thankfully receive ;
What to-morrow may betide
Calmly to Thy wisdom leave :
’Tis enough that Thou wilt care—
Why should I the burden bear ?

As a little child relies
On a care beyond his own,
Knows he’s neither strong nor wise,
Fears to stir a step alone,
Let me thus with Thee abide,
Thee my Father, Guard, and Guide.”

Dear friends, one word more before we close these chapters : “ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. iii. 10.) “ So then every one of us shall

give account of himself to God." (Rom xiv. 12.) We shall need a Friend in that awful day! yes, we shall need One to stand and plead for us then! Who do you think must be that Friend? Who must plead for us, dear friends? None but Jesus *can*: none but Jesus *will*. But if you would have Jesus for your friend *then*, you must come to Him *now*. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." (Psalm ii. 12.) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii. 36.)

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation, for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.) Come, then, dear friends, to this loving Saviour, His arms are open to receive you. His Blood will cleanse you from all sin: He died that you might live.

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One."
"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." (Isaiah xlv. 22.)

“Look to the dying One—
Whatever thy sin ;
There's plenteous redemption
And mercy in Him.

“Look to the dying One—
Whatever thy guilt ;
There's life and salvation
In the blood that was spilt.

“Look to the dying One—
And see from His side,
The love of the loving One
Gush forth in that tide.

“Look to the dying One—
Whatever thy care ;
There's strength for the needy
And sympathy there.

“Look to the dying One—
Whatever thy fear ;
When thick clouds are gathering
He draweth near.

“Look to the dying One—
Whatever thy way ;
And He shall be with thee,
Thy Strength and thy Stay.

“O look to thy Saviour,
Through all things below;
Soon the love of that Saviour,
Thou fully shalt know.”

The End.





